



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 1 January 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 20th January 2013: Pocharam. Meeting point: Hyderabad Central, Punjagutta, 6.00AM

Pocharam is a large reservoir on the Manjira River, about 70km downstream from Manjira Barrage. The reservoir is situated amidst undulating hills, with dry deciduous forest and scrub jungle. The lake varies in extent from 15,000 to 20,000 ha depending upon the season and fluctuations in rainfall. The lake is known to support a wide variety of resident, as well as migratory waterfowl. More than 53 species of waterfowl are listed for the area. Specialities include Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill and Bar-headed Goose.

Members are requested to be on time as it is a long, two-hour drive. This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: EARTHFLIGHT

Thursday, 24th January 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

Directed by John Downer, this British nature documentary, is a six-part voyage of discovery, spanning six continents and covering some of the world's greatest natural spectacles from a 'bird's-eye view'. Narrated by actor David Tennant, it captures some of the world's most extraordinary natural wonders through the eyes of birds. It is, to put it simply, breathtaking.

From 9,000 metres above the ground, viewers are given a new perspective of the continents through the latest tricks of cinematography. 'Spy-cams' expose the personal habits of wildlife, while slow-motion filming techniques reveal every millimeter of detail about birds, both in-flight and during their interaction with other creatures. January's episode of Earthflight will be about the birds of Europe.

Cranes are captured on camera as they fly over the Rock of Gibraltar and then the famous white horses of the Camargue, galloping through marshland, even more stunning with slow motion camera work. Over Rome, millions of starlings put on an aerial display to outwit the hungry peregrines. Cranes and geese rise over London almost at touching distance from the screen. At Bass Rock (Firth of Forth) thousands of gannets dive up to 22 meters (in slow-motion) gobbling fish. Swallows are beautifully filmed swooping on mayflies as they emerge from water at dusk. Ospreys and bears fishing in Finland add to the magnificence of the show.

OUT IN MEDAK – BY THE WATERS OF MANJIRA

Trip Report – Manjira WLS – 16th Dec. 2012

Urmimala Chatterjee

The Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary was the outing of the day for December 16, 2012. The Manjira, a tributary of the Godavari, is fed by monsoon rains and little tributaries and is, needless to say, an ecosystem that is fragile and on the edge. It is a gathering area for birds in winter as they wing down to rest and feed in the waters.

On the day, the pre-dawn darkness did not have the nip and sting of winter as we gathered to prepare for the journey towards the Sanctuary. We were a total of 35 birders in ten cars and on five motorbikes. I, for one, insisted on a ride in the rugged open jeep of Ishrat's that I had enjoyed in the previous trip to Ananthagiri and Kotepally.

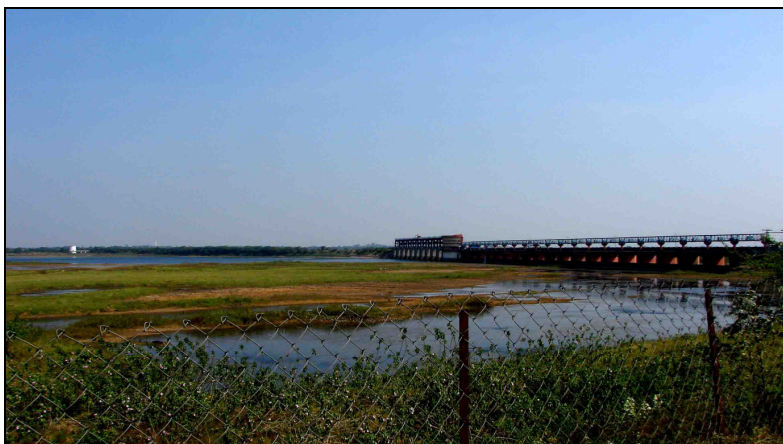


Photo: Nupur Sengupta

In the breaking dawn, we coursed through the trundling traffic, heavy trucks ploughing across endless roads of an endless city. I felt dull, straining to see the trees, the woods, the fields and the water. I sat inside the open jeep, quietly longing. The birders are personable, friendly, warm. I admire their eye and experience of birding. I am among them, learning.

There was a rich spread of birds on the yellow fields and the waters. The air was moist and warm. Lesser Whistling-ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*) were gathered on the dimly-lit shallows while a flock took wing in the sky.



Photo: Nupur Sengupta

We stopped by a large, spare, wayside inn. We had frothing tea, coffee, milk. As we made our way into the spreading green of the countryside, I felt relieved. On the way, we turned off the road onto a narrow track by slow still waters and stopped. The place was Angadpet.



Black-shouldered Kite (Photo: Humayun Taher)

On the fields was an immature Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*). It was grey in colour. There were Pied Bushchats (*Saxicola caprata*), a Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) and a Black-headed Munia (*Lonchura malacca*).



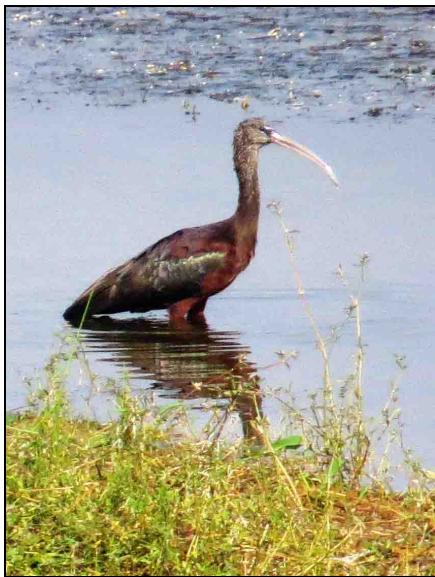
Lesser Whistling-duck (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

We made our way ahead on the track and climbed up an incline of tangled plants. From there we saw silent moving Cotton Pygmy-geese (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) and Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) against the light. The birds were further away into the waters. Closer by, a solitary Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) stretched and pulled across with bobbing movements of the head – very pretty and quaint.



Bluethroat (Photo: Humayun Taher)

There was also a Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) flying in the sky and a Purple Swampphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). There was an elusive hidden Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) and a Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) in the shallows. There was a dense growth of elephant ears on the bank and pretty pink flowers. I wish I knew their name. I deplore an education that teaches us a lot but in which we do not the name of a tree, flower, bird and animal and their way of being.



Glossy Ibis (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Turning to the fields, we spotted Pied Bushchats, Bronzewing Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*), River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*), Yellow Wagtails (*Motacilla flava*) – a line of them across a wire. There were more Egrets and Ibises – on the head of a tree.



Indian Pond Heron (Photo: Humayun Taher)

There were bird calls in the sky and on the waters. We struggled away from Angadpet and made our way ahead on the road – towards Manjira Barrage. The morning light cleared as moved on the road and entered the Wildlife Sanctuary.

Indian flying foxes were flying high above and calling out in the glistening light. They gathered in groups to sleep, hanging upside down from the tall eucalyptus trees. We wondered at them, still awake in the daylight and carried on up the steps to the river across where the barrage stands.



Long-tailed Shrike (Photo: Humayun Taher)

On the little islands on the river, there were Glossy Ibises, Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*), Spot-billed Ducks. There was a Purple Swampphen clambering to the bank, shaking off water and rich in colour – red beak, royal blue and green plumage.

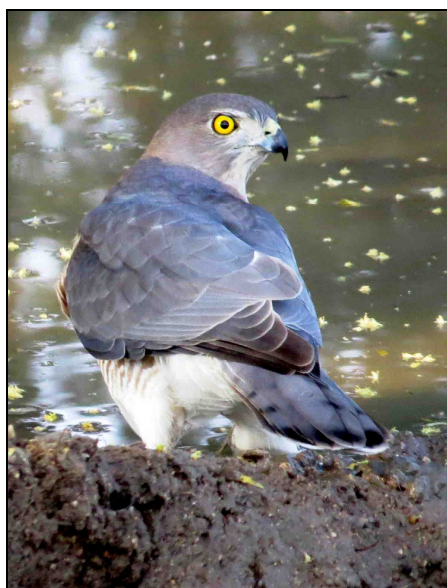


Blyth's Pipit (Photo: Humayun Taher)

We also spied a Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) by the side of which there was a mugger crocodile at rest in the sun – like a black rock. To another side by the river, there were Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) with beautifully slender guava-pink legs.

We moved down the steps to gather together for breakfast in the Environmental Education Centre in the Sanctuary. It is a cottage with a garden around – colourful flowers and colourful leaves. We had breakfast on a large table in a room full of books in cabinets and yellow walls. It was a warm breakfast – of fun and a whole lot of food.

To the back of the house, there is a small enclosure for breeding mugger crocodiles. There were all basking in the sun – still like rocks. You could not understand when one of them moved and splashed into the water.



Shikra (Photo: Humayun Taher)

There were many bits and snatches of impression that made up the whole of the day. To note a few: the many different kinds of *idlis* for breakfast; a little fellow with wonderfully sharp binoculars; Humayun's field scope; Asif's camera; Surekha and Anjali's penetrating eye for birding; K Nanda Kumar who has a shop of musical instruments and, of course, the open jeep. There should be an ode written on the jeep. I can't have enough of it, it seems.



Green Bee-eater (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

As we walked out into the sun, there were birds flying in the sky – a Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*), Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) and Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*). We went up to a bird tower and climbed up the rickety steps to see if we could spot more birds. There were Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) and a sunbird of purplish gloss that flitted in and out of trees. Manjira has dried up in many places along the way. The rains have not been enough during the year. Also, the dams built across have stopped the flow of water into the river from her different tributaries. The waters have gone down with soil, earth and rock standing dry.



Photo: Nupur Sengupta

On a water body ahead of the river, there were more birds to see. We travelled down the road. Ishrat drove the jeep to the last tip on the edge of the lake. A cool breeze blew in. The sun was now up in the sky and hot. The ripples flowed in and out – lit up. We looked out to the waters.



Great Cormorant (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

The lake is not wild. There is a temple close to the lake and houses not far away. But, there were birds everywhere. There were Whistling-ducks, Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*), House Swifts (*Apus affinis*), Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), Pied Kingfisher, Cormorant, Bronze-winged Jacana, Little Egrets that “wear yellow socks.” There was Asian

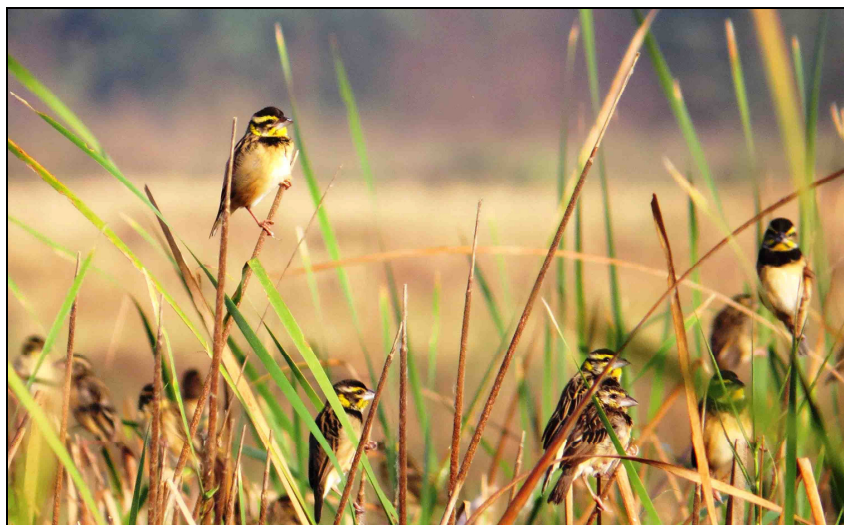
Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) and Grey Heron. There were Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*) with black legs. There were Little Grebes moving. There were bobbing Coots on the waters – how pretty! I admire them. There was another group of Coots closer to the bank, and one had a head that was completely white.

The waters splashed to the shore. Along the shoreline, across, there were a line of birds – Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*) and Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*). Above the waters, an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) caught a fish.



Osprey with kill (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Finally, we moved away again – this time to go back to the city.



Black-breasted Weaver (Photo: Humayun Taher)

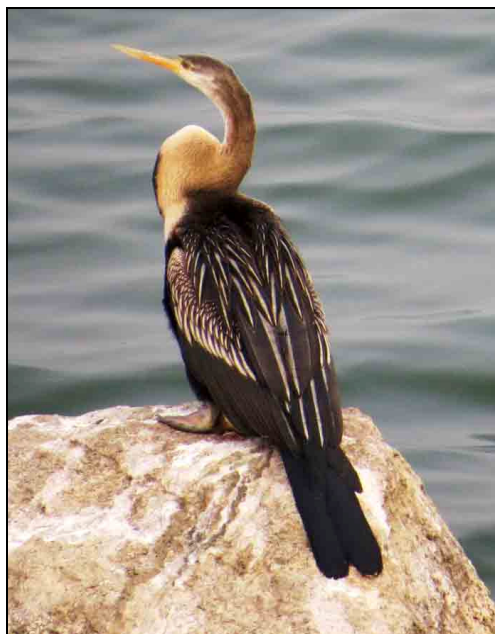
Trip Report – Ameenpura Lake – 25th Nov. 2012

Text & photos: Humayun Taher

In April of this year, a new place had been discovered where thousands of Yellow Wagtails were found roosting. This place had been reported about in the May 2012 issue of PITTA (*“CONCERNING SPARROWS AND OTHER MATTERS PASSERINE... Trip Report – Ameenpur Lake – 1st April 2012”*). Bearing in mind that the winter migration had started, it seemed a good idea to visit this place again and see whether the birds had been using this roosting site only as a stop on the return migration, or whether it was a regular roost. So a trip to Ameenpura was planned for 25th November. Keeping the earlier visit in mind, we decided to make this also an evening visit. Accordingly I phoned our friend Dheeraj, who had originally led us to the place. His first report appeared disappointing. He told us that the reeds where the birds roosted were completely dried up and there were no birds

roosting at the place. Somewhat chagrined by this news, we nevertheless decided to go and see what was to be seen. The appended list shows that this was certainly not a wasted trip.

Ameenpura Lake lies north-east of BHEL Ramchandrapuram. The precise location of the lake is +17° 31' 23.87", +78° 19' 50.77". The lake is a fairly large body of water, about 2.5 sq. km. in area. There is no depth-gauge here and, at a rough guess, I would say that the deepest part would not exceed about 10 ft. in depth in full season. Again, compared to the April visit, the lake was considerably fuller, which is to be expected, given that the majority of the water appears to come from percolating rainfall; there is no other visible entry of water into the lake.



Darter

There is considerable disturbance to the water here. The lake is leased for a period of three years at a time for the fishing rights. The lessee then stocks the lake with fingerlings, allows them to grow to an optimum size and then harvests the same. Because of this unnatural stocking, the lake is rich in fish and the fish-eating birds such as the Cormorants and Darters, Egrets and Herons are quite numerous. At the same time, because of the commercial interests involved, these birds are unwelcome visitors and there have been recent reports that the nearby villagers (who appear to hold the fishing lease), are bursting firecrackers and taking other measures to prevent the birds from settling on the waters. From what we could see, this does not appear to have very significantly decreased the birds. We counted fair numbers of Large and Little Cormorants, Darters, Egrets (all four species),

several River Terns, Grey and Pond Herons and about 25 Painted Storks on the lake.

There is potential here for additional species as well. To the North and South of the lake are small fields with crops such as rice and sorghum. The southern side also has some scrub jungle, which attracts scrubland birds. East of the lake, new settlements are coming up with blocks of flats and high-rise buildings. West is the village of Ameenpura; this village incidentally boasts a very large population of House Sparrows. We had seen over 50 in our April trip and this time also I would hazard that we saw at least the same number or even more. There is something here that is attracting these birds and investigation is required on what is the prime attraction.



Comb Duck

And so, on the afternoon of 25th November, Shafaat Ulla saab, Ishrat Ulla, Kulkarni, Dheeraj and yours truly headed out towards the lake. En route there was this very interesting marsh abutting the road. On our previous trip I had noted this as a worthwhile place to stop, so this time, we decided to halt for a while. The marsh is to the right of the Ameenpura main road and the surrounding area is called “Bandam Kommu”. This little marsh is full of floating plants such as hyacinth and reeds. Notwithstanding, there is considerable activity here. Foremost were about 6 Comb Ducks which were grazing on the water-weeds on the far shore. A couple of them were swimming in the water and did not seem very disturbed by the noise of the traffic passing by on the road. There were several Coots in the water and a few Common Moorhens. A couple of Purple Swampheens and a White-breasted Waterhen were also seen; besides, I noted a pair of Little Grebes and a single Pheasant-tailed Jacana here. On a rock in the water perched two Red-wattled Lapwings and a few Large Cormorants and, further along, there were a few Little Cormorants. Red-rumped Swallows were perched on nearby electricity lines and a few other little birds were seen such as Green Bee-eater, Long-tailed Shrike, Large Grey Babbler and Baya Weaver. Fully convinced that this is indeed a very interesting place and deserving of a more intensive investigation, we now proceeded towards our main objective.

Passing through Ameenpura village, where we saw the Sparrows in large numbers in their usual area, along with a couple of Common Mynas, a small group of Blue Rock Pigeons, a solitary Shikra and some Black Kites, we finally reached the lake. A sweep with the binoculars

revealed a large number of birds in attendance so we took the *kutchra* road that led to the lake-shore and then got out to investigate.



Black-winged Stilt

Foremost were the Large Cormorants. There was a large party on the lake and they were in constant activity. A small group was in the water and was busy herding the fish. Over this frenzy swept a few River Terns and one Whiskered Tern. A small group of Painted Storks explored the shallows of a sheltered bay. But what attracted our attention most was the waders. There were a fair number of Little Stints probing in the shallows. Two Wood Sandpipers trotted around. Three Marsh Sandpipers accompanied the Stints in their probing. A solitary Greenshank stood on one leg in contemplative attitude. Black-winged Stilts were present in good numbers. On the shore were a couple of Little Ringed Plovers. Large, Intermediate and Little Egrets were also busy in the shallows. Three species of Wagtail (White-browed, White and Citrine) were present on the lake shores. About 4 or 5 Grey Herons also joined in the feeding frenzy.



Common Kingfisher

All the three species of Kingfisher (Pied, Common and White-throated) patrolled the waters. Over all this came the calls of Greater Coucal, Spotted Dove and Grey Francolin. Spotted Owlets also called from a nearby copse where, according to Dheeraj, there is a small group permanently resident. Of ducks, there was a small raft of Garganey (about 20 in all) and a pair of Ruddy Shelduck. It was a wonderful experience, listening to these calls and realizing that there was such a large population of birds so close to the city limits. Of course, it is entirely possible that the birds are there simply because they have nowhere else to go, but still it is heartening that they are making the effort to adapt to the human invasion and are trying to coexist, however precariously, with the human intruders to their habitat.



Garganey (female)

Satisfied with this bonanza, we decided to go towards the roosting pond and see what was to be seen there. Accordingly we turned, disturbing on the way, a juvenile Brahminy Kite. While passing over the lake bund, in the fields behind, we observed a couple of Indian Peafowl and also a small group of Yellow-billed Babblers. Also seen was a solitary Darter, sitting on a rock in the lake. From our elevated position we had a good view of the bird as it sat there reasonably undisturbed by our presence. From this vantage point we were able to make out that the Large Cormorants were almost exclusively taking possession of the waters. There was not a single Little Cormorant seen on this lake, neither in the water, nor nearby; although there were a few in the small roosting pond.

Continuing on our way, we got to the roosting pond and found, as Dheeraj had told us, that the *typha* reeds were almost completely dried out and that the pond was bare. The rocks, on which we had perched in April, could now only be reached by wading through knee-deep water, which I was not inclined to try. On this rock perched a few Little and Large Cormorants and three Darters. In the dried reeds we counted a couple more Darters and about 8 Spot-billed Ducks. A pair of Pied Kingfishers and a Common Kingfisher also found the rock much to their liking. In the scrublands beside this pond, a Marsh Harrier was quartering the ground; it was soon joined by a female Montagu's Harrier. Large groups of Barn and Red-

rumped Swallows were on the wing and a few Asian Palm Swifts also. Laughing Doves were on the rocks and a female Blue Rock Thrush was another interesting sighting. A considerable flock of Red Avadavats (Red Munias) flew past, but did not settle on the dried foliage around the pond. I guess they are roosting somewhere close by until the reeds should again grow.



Yellow Wagtail

Sipping hot tea, we observed the bird activity in this area which was now slowing down as the sun was sinking. About the last notable sighting was a couple of Black Ibis, accompanied by a solitary Black-headed Ibis sweeping around a small grove of trees, probably settling down for the night. A large group of Painted Storks were seen on the rocks here; it is possible that they congregate thus before moving to a safe roosting site. Or they may even be roosting in this place itself, although it is quite open and not entirely safe. Further observations may throw more light on this.



Photo submitted by: Humayun Taher

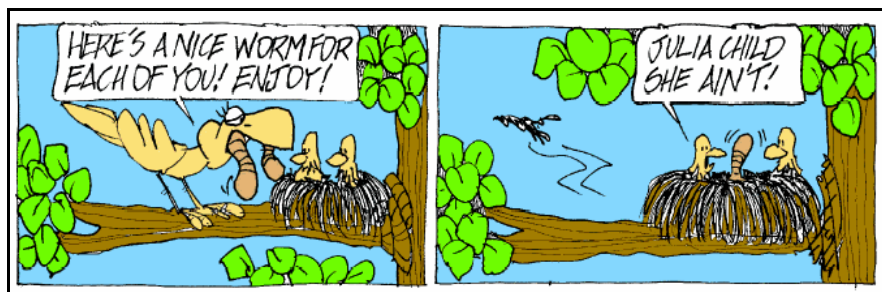
Fully satisfied with our experiences, we now returned, getting back to the city within 5 hours of having left it. The entire experience was quite interesting and, as for the birds; well, take a look for yourself at the appended list. I for one, found it extremely entertaining indeed.

The complete list of birds seen (at Ameenpura, Bandam Kommu and scrublands) is given below:

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
1	R	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	
2	R	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	
3	R	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	
4	R	Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	NT
5	R	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	
6	R	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	
7	R	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	
8	R	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
9	R	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	
10	R	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	
11	R	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	NT
12	R	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	
13	R	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	NT
14	R	Black Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>	
15	M	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	
16	R	Comb Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>	
17	R	Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	
18	M	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	
19	R	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	
20	R	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	
21	M	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	
22	M	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	
23	R	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	
24	R	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	
25	R	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	
26	R	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	
27	R	Purple Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	
28	R	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	
29	R	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	
30	R	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	
31	M	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	
32	R	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	
33	M	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	
34	M	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	
35	M	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	
36	M	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	
37	R	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	
38	R	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	
39	M	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	
40	R	Blue Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>	
41	R	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	
42	R	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	
43	R	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
44	R	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	
45	R	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>	
46	R	Asian Palm-swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	
47	R	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	
48	R	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	
49	R	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	
50	R	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	
51	R	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	
52	R	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>	
53	M	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
54	R,M	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	
55	M	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	
56	R	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	
57	M	Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	
58	R	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	
59	R	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	
60	M	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	
61	R	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus</i>	
62	R	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata bicolor</i>	
63	R	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	
64	R	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	
65	R	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	
66	R	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	
67	R	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>	
68	R	Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>	
69	R	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	
70	R	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	
71	R	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	
72	R	Brahminy Starling	<i>Temenuchus pagodarum</i>	
73	R	Asian Pied Starling	<i>Gracupica contra</i>	
74	R	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	
75	R	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	
76	R	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 26-09-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)



Red-vented Bulbul (Sainikpuri, 11-04-2010)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Pycnonotidae
Genus: *Pycnonotus*
Species: *P. cafer*
Size: 18-20 cm

Description & distribution: The Red-vented Bulbul is a member of the bulbul family of passerines. It is a resident breeder across India, Sri Lanka, east up to Myanmar, and north up to Tibet. Originally described by Linnaeus in 1766, the Red-vented Bulbul has a dark-brown body with a scaly pattern on the undersides, and the head, which is dark-brown or black, has a short, black crest. It has a white rump and a red vent, and a white-tipped black tail.

The nominate race is seen in southern India, but several other races are recognized. In general, the Himalayan races have a more prominent crest and the streaks on the underside are more marked. *P. c. intermedius*, seen in Kashmir and along the Western Himalayas to Kumaon, has a black hood extending down to the mid-breast. *P. c. benghalensis* of the Central and Eastern Himalayas and the Gangetic plain has a dark hood, and has dark streaks on the lower belly instead of the scale-like pattern. *P. c. humayuni* of Sindh and north-western India has a paler brown mantle. *P. c. stanfordii* is seen in north-eastern India, while *P. c. wetmorei*, also seen in the north-east, has a longer tail. The Sri Lankan race, *P. c. haemorrhous*, has a dark mantle with narrow pale edges.

A couple of hybrid races are also known. The desert race, *P. c. humayuni*, is known to hybridize with the Himalayan Bulbul *P. leucogenys*, and was once described as *P. c. magrathi*, marked by pale rumps and yellow-orange or pinkish vents. In Eastern Myanmar, it shows some natural hybridization with the Sooty-headed Bulbul *P. aurigaster*. The sexes are alike, but young birds show duller colours than adults. Melanistic and leucistic individuals have been noted.

Behaviour: The Red-vented Bulbul is usually seen singly or in pairs. It prefers dry scrub, open forest, plains and cultivated lands, and is rarely seen in mature forests. It is not very shy, and often allows fairly close approaches, at most moving away to another branch nearby.

An introduced bird in several other countries, it is generally regarded as a pest due to its habit of damaging fruit crops, and has been exterminated in some places as a result. Its diet consists mainly of fruit, flower petals, nectar, insects and occasionally geckos; it is also known to feed on leaves of certain plants like *Medicago sativa*.

A number of different calls have been noted, including greeting, roosting, begging, flight and alarm calls. One call can be heard here.

Nesting: The Red-vented Bulbul breeds between June and September. The nest is a small, flat cup made of small twigs, but the Red-vented Bulbul occasionally also uses metal wires in its nest. The nest is usually built in bushes around 2-3 metres from the ground, but have been noted inside houses, in holes in mud banks, inside tree cavities, and even on floating water hyacinth.

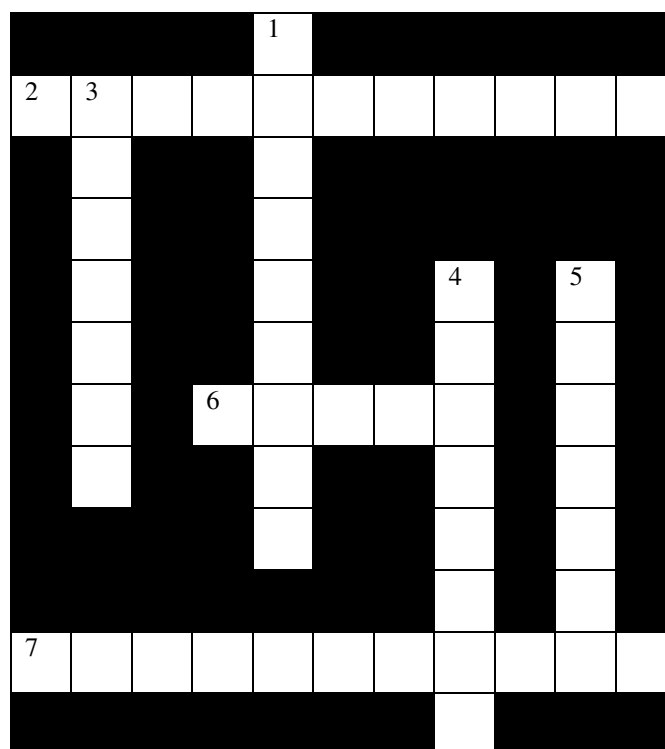
The Red-vented Bulbul may have multiple clutches in a year; the typical clutch is 2-3 pale pinkish eggs having darker red spots, which are denser at the broad end of the egg. Feeding duties are taken care of by both parents, and on these trips, they wait for the young to excrete, swallowing the faecal sacs thus produced.

Local name: It is known as 'kala bulbul' in Hindi, 'pigli-pitta' in Telugu, 'kondai kuruvi' in Tamil, and 'nattu bulbul' in Malayalam.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #13

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 2 - Endlessly awkward in Shropshire, in short (11)
6 - Picture-in-picture? It suits this bird (5)
7 - Glimmer on the ear of this bird? Only if you go East! (11)

DOWN

- 1 - This bird is going all over the place with Big B! (9)
3 - Fish-eater digesting plaice in the middle of lunch (7)
4 - This bird knows where to get a tan (8)
5 - Fruit takes a long time to turn into colourful feathers (7)

Solutions to Crossword #12 (Pitta, December 2012)

ACROSS: 3 – PLOVER, 6 – NUTCRACKER, 8 – NIGHTJAR

DOWN: 1 – PETRONIA, 2 – COCHOA, 4 – KNOT, 5 – WHEATEAR, 7 – TIT

For Private Circulation Only

Editor: Shanti Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 2 February 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 17th February 2013: Ananthagiri Hills. Meeting point: Hyderabad Central, Punjagutta, 6.30AM

The day should make for not only a pleasant woodland walk, but also great birding. Ananthagiri, one of the best birding locations near Hyderabad, has never disappointed and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White-eyes, Chloropsis, the Orange-headed Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier. This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: UNDERSTANDING BIRD FLIGHT -

Thursday, 24th February 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

Wing Commander (Retd) Prakash Rao served in the Indian Air Force as a helicopter pilot. A life member of our society and a keen photographer, he will speak about "Understanding Bird Flight", and will discuss various aspects of aerodynamics; it would be of great interest for all birdwatchers.

Trip Report – Pocharam – 20th January 2013

Text and photos: Dr Niaz Abdur-Rahman



Bar-headed Geese

Going Birding - Is there a better way to relax oneself and get rid of the tensions and anxieties of everyday life? I do not think so. On a recent professional trip to Hyderabad I had the utmost desire to go birding one morning. Asif Husain Arastu, a keen birder from the city was known to me for the last couple of years since he took me birding to Narsapur forest once. This time also he arranged for me and my wife to join the birders from BSAP –

Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh - on one of their seasonal outings on 20th January 2013. This was a very pleasant trip with around 25 members of the society and a few other guests including two other Ophthalmologists, one, Dr. Igor Tavrar, from Germany and another from Bangalore, who were attending the same conference as me.

In the wee hours of the morning we all met at a designated spot and drove off to Pocharam, about 120 km from Hyderabad, in the district of Medak. I found out that there is a wildlife sanctuary at Pocharam for the last 60 years and there is also a lake or large water reservoir attracting winter migrant birds. I was quite excited at the prospect of seeing a few new species that we normally do not come across in Bangladesh. Our country is geographically East Bengal bordering West Bengal, Assam, Eastern Indian States and Myanmar, hence the bird population is similar to that found in Eastern India and West Bengal.

I always find it interesting that we can get excited over a very common species of bird in a particular location which does not exist in one's own country. This happened to me many years ago when I first saw the Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*)! The Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) is the commonest bird seen in Bangladesh but we never see the Indian Robin. When I came across an Indian Robin for the first time, I was thrilled and took dozens of photographs which my accompanying friend failed to appreciate!

My wife and I were travelling by Asif's car accompanied by Ms. Surekha Aitabathula. I found both of them knowledgeable birders and wonderful travelling companions; there was never a dull moment in the car. On our way to Pocharam we stopped at the roadside for the whole group to catch up. There was a large flock of Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*). I took my camera out to get a shot – lo and behold, there was also an Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyeros birostris*) in the tree.



Indian Grey Hornbill

I thanked my lucky stars - the habitat of the Grey Hornbill does extend up to Bengal but we never see it. I got a few decent distant photos of the hornbill - that marked the

start of a wonderful day of birding. We soon reached the lake and were greeted by a pair of Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and a small party of Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*) that were dabbling at the water's edge. The flock took off on seeing us.



Purple-rumped Sunbird

At first sight, the lake looked fairly large, very serene with some scattered waterfowl. The area round the lake was somewhat rocky with dry scrubs and held a lot of surprises for us. A party of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*) was seen at a distance, thrilling for me as they do not exist in Bangladesh. I got introduced to a number of birders of BSAP including the President of the society Mr. Aasheesh Pittie. There was a flock of Greater Flamingoes (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) on the far banks of the lake and Aasheesh showed them to me through his spotting scope. Flamingoes are a treat as they visit Western India and some also breed in Gujarat.



Purple Sunbird

The bank of the lake was blooming with primroses; quite a few Purple (*Nectarinia asiatica*) and Purple-rumped (*Nectarinia zeylonica*) Sunbirds were feasting on the nectar. The early morning sun from the mid horizon was shining on the sunbirds so beautifully, I could not resist the temptation to spend a good amount of time trying to get a few good shots of these tiny hyperactive beauties. Every now and then a flock of Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) would honk overhead and settle on the far banks along with Little (*Phalacrocorax niger*) and Great (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) Cormorants, Eurasian Wigeons (*Anas penelope*), Herons, Terns and Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*). A solitary Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) was seen flying off.



Interestingly we found a bird trap; this led to good conversations with some of the birders regarding conservation and protection of wildlife. We felt that although someone is trying to make a living out of this, the wildlife protection authorities should be more vigilant to prevent this kind of active poaching within a sanctuary. We spent the pleasant morning spotting quite a few other birds.

Besides knowledgeable birders, I came across a few serious photographers. One of them showed me a photo of a Blue-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*) which he took on the way to Pocharam. Around noon we drove to the forest office bungalow where we were treated to tasty snacks brought by the members of the society. A Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*) kept all the photographers busy with its acrobatics along with periods of posing for photographs.



Green Bee-eater

The compiled checklist for the trip added up to 75 species. It was a pleasure meeting the birders of BSAP, especially the President who I found to be a charismatic gentleman. Hope to see more of AP / Deccan Plateau birds in the future, if I happen to be in the area. I would also like to extend an open invitation to birder friends of Hyderabad to visit Bangladesh for exciting birding adventures.



Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark

Dr Niaz Abdur-Rahman is the President of the Bangladesh bird club. An ophthalmologist by profession, he is a keen birder and photographer. In Hyderabad for the World Ophthalmologists Conference, he, along with his wife Mrs Lisa, joined our members on the outing to Pocharam.

Trip Report – Osman Sagar (Gandipet) – 6th January 2013

Text & photos: Humayun Taher

January is a fairly busy month for members of the BSAP. It is the time of the annual exercise of the Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Census; when we all gird our loins and sally forth to count wintering waterfowl on the numerous lakes, ponds and marshes that dot the countryside. It is less now than it used to be in the old days, but we still manage to do a fair number of the old, established sites. One such is the Osman Sagar Reservoir, also known as the Gandipet Lake. It was for the purpose of the AWC count that we found ourselves, in the early hours of 6th January, sipping a hot *chai* at a wayside *dhaba*, en route to the Gandipet Lake.

Located in Ranga Reddy district, Gandipet Lake spans an area of over 12 sq. km. The waters of this reservoir are used for supplying drinking water to some areas of the city and therefore it comes under the purview of the Water Board authorities. Also, since there is a small population of Mugger Crocodiles (*Crocodylus palustris*) in the reservoir, the Forest Department also has a vested interest in the lake. It is also a popular picnic spot for citizens of Hyderabad with some amenities such as a playground and a small park with trees and lawns on which to picnic.

However, our objective was sterner and so we proceeded away from the beaten track and towards the far end of the lake. Here, in the shallow waters, we expected to see the bulk of the bird population of the place.



Black-shouldered Kite

At first glance, it looked quite barren. There were a few River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) and a Gull or two floating about. A Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) showed us how to catch locusts, by catching one right in front of us.

A few Egrets dotted the surface and, in a flooded paddyfield, a pair of Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) probed the slush hopefully. Hardly any waders were visible, though there was promise in the shape of a small flock of about 35 Small Pratincoles (*Glareola lactea*) that came flying in and settled on the shores quite close to us.



Small Pratincole

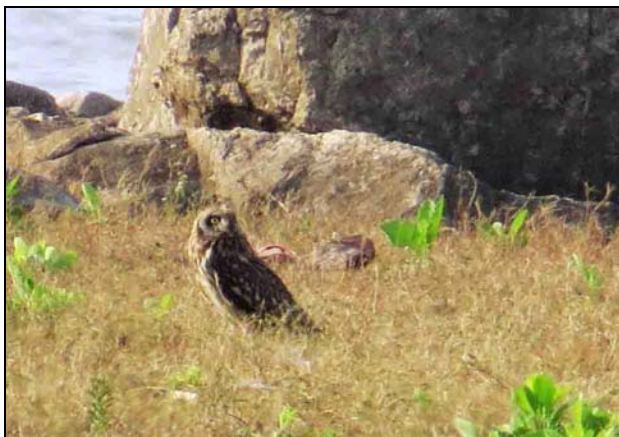
A Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) potted around in the rather purposeful way that these birds have. Swallows were all around. I noticed that they seemed to be following the Jeep. No doubt they were using it in the same way that Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) use cattle. The movement of the vehicle through the grass and scrub doubtless disturbed a lot of the midges and flies that were resident in the scrub and the swallows were following us to feast on the banquet of these unfortunate insects. Out of the frying pan and into the fire, indeed!



Common Teal

Continuing along the lake shore, we now started to see more birds. A single drake Common Teal (*Anas crecca*) floated serenely in a small bay. He was accompanied by a small group of Little Stints (*Calidris minuta*) that probed busily in the shallows, looking for victuals. A little further up was a quartet of Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*). And then suddenly a large brown bird shot up from the ground in front of the vehicle and flapped off further away. Loud exclamations rent the air because even with that one glimpse, we knew we were looking at something interesting. The bird perched on the ground, some distance away and we were easily able to identify it as a Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*).

Seen through the binoculars it was a fine-looking bird, the small ear-tufts showing prominently. It sat there staring at us out of golden-yellow eyes, occasionally twisting his head around in the strange, boneless way these birds have. We were most pleased to see this chap as it is not a bird seen every day, in these parts at least.



Short-eared Owl

Having finally decided that we were not welcome guests, the owl took off and disappeared into a small thicket of trees. Meantime, we scanned the waters and were disappointed to see that there seemed to be nothing more in this area. Plans were discussed and it was unanimously decided that breakfast and a soothing cuppa were of the first importance. After that, we would investigate the far backwaters of the lake, in the vicinity of Janwada village, where there is usually a fair population of herons and storks in the shallows. So, having fortified ourselves with plates of hot *puris* and other sundry comestibles, we took the road leading to Janwada village and so beyond.

And here it was that the value of the four-wheel drive vehicle was brought home to us. Under Ishrat's skillful

driving, the tough vehicle made light of the almost trackless terrain that we traversed. The swallows were now convinced that we had been sent directly from heaven for the express purpose of helping them to stock up the commissariat. Clouds of midges and moths rose all around us out of the tall grass we were driving through and the swallows made sure that few of these escaped their sharp eyes and ready digestive juices. Pleased that we were doing our bit towards bird-feeding, we reached a small promontory close to the lake shore and stopped (much, I may add, to the mortification of the swallows), to scan the ground and the shallows and see what was on offer.



A white shimmering patch in the shallows seemed to be egrets. The telescope now came out and I applied my eyes to it and started to scan the lake. Good heavens! – surely not. It looks suspicious... can it be... Most certainly it can. The white patch resolved itself into a small flock of Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*). Exciting was not the word, suddenly we were all electrified.



Greater Flamingo

Shafaat saab and Anjali started looking for the quickest way to get closer. Meanwhile, there were other birds seen through the scope. Five Eurasian Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) swept the waters for food. Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), Large (*Ardea alba*) and Intermediate (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) Egrets and a couple of Asian Openbills were dotted all through the shallows.



Eurasian Spoonbill

Ducks were there in very great numbers. They were scattered around in small rafts and seemed mostly to be Northern Pintails with a few Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) interspersed. Common (*Actitis hypoleucos*) and Wood (*Tringa glareola*) Sandpipers patrolled the shores. A large flock of wading birds in the shallowest parts of the lake were identified as Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*), a few still showing remnants of their breeding plumage. Fully convinced that we had hit the jackpot, we now settled down on a few convenient rocks to count the birds we could see.

Over 200 Greater Flamingos, over 1200 Northern Pintails, over 300 Black-tailed Godwits, over 100 Spot-billed Ducks... surely this was a most satisfactory count. But wait; there came Ishrat with a report of geese further

ahead. Excitement reached a new high. There were over 150 Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) strung out along the shores of a small bay. This certainly seems to be a very rich spot by any standards. It is not often that one is privileged to see Flamingos and Geese together in such decent numbers. Add that to the large number of Pintails and Godwits and joy becomes unconfined.



Indian Skylark

And so, fully satisfied that our morning had been extraordinarily productive and interesting, we retraced our steps, encountering along the way an extraordinarily large congregation of Cattle Egrets gathered in a small paddy field. There were quite some 300 odd egrets in this place, accompanied by a solitary Black-headed Ibis. The birds were quite possibly waiting for the day to become a trifle cooler before they sallied forth again in their search for food. This was about the last of our sightings. Stopping only for a steaming cuppa, we started back with a bag of about 80 species and a most satisfactory day as far as the Waterfowl Census was concerned. I think we should all do these trips more often.

Report - Indoor Meeting – 24th January 2013 **EARTHFLIGHT Episode Three – EUROPE: IN TIME FOR HOME**

Urmimala Chatterjee

Taking off from Africa, Earthflight Europe tracks the journeys of migratory birds as they fly and struggle to reach their homes in time. They are all hard-pressed; there is an urgency in their flights across the skies, of a moment that can slip away too soon. They are in haste towards a life that needs to begin – they need to nest and hatch in the circling wheel of life and season. The birds know of the time in their bodies and they battle to keep it right. Should a moment slip by, a life is lost, irrevocably.

The white storks flying out of Africa face many challenges – they have been taken off course over the Sea of Marmara and they are weak from the journey. To fly,

the storks need rising currents of hot air but these cannot form over water. They are “flapping for their lives” and they fall dangerously low. If a wing tip touches the water, they would drown. But, they have a lifeline on the way – the Princess Islands that rise from the sea create funnels upon which the storks gain as much height as possible. The islands are like stepping stones across the seas – “mainland Europe is tantalisingly close”; they soar upwards one last time and they glide the seven miles towards Istanbul that is the gateway to Europe for millions of migratory birds as they sprint towards “re-colonising the continent.”

Other birds travel across less hazardous routes. Grey Cranes cross the Strait of Gibraltar, a stretch of 15 miles of sea between Europe and Africa. They cross the Rock of Gibraltar. On a good day, cranes can travel 800 miles but three days of continuous flying exhausts them. They land in Camargue – western Europe’s largest river delta. The delta is famous for the white horses that have roamed the marshes for centuries. Other travel-weary birds join the cranes – Greater Flamingos who have flown in from the west of Africa. But, the delta is not quite as peaceful. It is the breeding season and feisty stallions charge across the waters to round up the mares. The birds fly to quieter lagoons in the Camargue but the cranes do not stay for long – they have a date to keep.



The storks are equally pushed for time; cities are an essential part of their time plan as they race to reach their nests in the heart of Europe.

Roofs act like storage heaters, pumping out heat as do sun-baked roads. A warm city benefits birds in many ways; in the winter sky in Rome, a five million murmuration of starlings manoeuvre in an “iridescent display lit up by the setting sun,” to confuse and outwit the hunting Peregrine Falcon. Despite his best efforts, the falcon is out-manoeuvred and out-performed and the starlings leave for the wilds of Siberia to breed.

Cities are not so popular with migrating birds. Venice was earlier large tracts of marshlands in which migrating cranes would drop down to breed but now they keep flying. With air rising in the wings, the mother guides her offspring; next year, the young have to make the journey alone. Further along the coast, some marshlands are perfect for breeding.

Despite its dwindling wild places, Europe is still a magnet for migrating birds. Sandpipers breed by a river in Hungary and feed chicks. The river is a perfect banquet; breeding mayflies tremble delicately upon the water for the three hours in which they mate and lay eggs. They are perfect food for hungry chicks. As the day ends, the mayflies perform their last swansong whilst the sandpipers have lost edge and appetite.

The biggest challenge for migratory birds is to keep on course; their body clocks are tuned into the sun’s course across the skies. Alternately, they also trust their eyes as the land unfolds before them like a map. Many cranes still have a thousand miles to cover but the storks are nearing the end of their journey.

In a village in eastern Germany, a male stork prepares to land. He whiffles, spilling air from his wings and splaying his feet that act like wind brakes. He is returning to his ancestral home that has been there for centuries. Younger males try to take over the nests and the older storks guard their nests like family heirlooms. Eventually, they settle down and to fill the time they spring-clean their nests. They have not seen their mates for eight months and they need to make a good impression; they preen themselves and they are ready, waiting, but so far, only swallows and house martins are flying into their homes. The storks search the skies for their mates. There is no one in sight. They could face an agonising wait.

Great Geese fly together as whole families – mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles. They winter on the coastal marshes of Mont Saint Michelle in northern France but in spring they leave for the extreme north of Europe crossing the English Channel to the white cliffs of Dover into Britain.

As the geese leave, the swallows arrive to their family nests. The swallows have travelled 6000 miles to nests that have been home for 50 years and like all old property they need a spot of renovation. The male swallows get busy on ground and in the air. One smart fellow spruces up his nest beautifully with a feather. He is just in time! Just in time to impress the female swallow flying in to inspect the softly-furnished nest. She calls out to him and they form a couple – house-proud and completed with the success of their migration.

London is hardly any attraction for migrating flocks but there are birds that have made unscheduled stops due to bad weather. A wedge of Barnacle Geese are “among the waifs and strays” who find themselves “on the wrong side of time” and “they use all their navigation skills to get back on track.”

The Barnacle Geese travel north to the city of Edinburgh. They hug the coast, moving inland if they sense danger. But the falling air pressure warns of an approaching weather front. Though safer inland, some storms are impossible to avoid. Thankfully, though, the birds are equipped with the best wet-weather gear; the feathers on the wings interlock to form a watertight seal as they fly through driving rain pounding at 40 miles an hour. The water runs off their backs.

Ahead of the storm, the geese encounter the Golden Eagle - Scotland's deadliest aerial predator. The geese whittle to lose height quickly. But, now, the hunter is under attack by a mob of noisy crows that bring down anyone intruding into their territory. The eagle loses flight and focus and the geese high-tail it across the skies. The Barnacle Geese move North-west, crossing Loch Ness and just ahead the lost birds spot a skein of geese - they've found their flock again! And together they stop down to rest.

But, spring is also the time of the mad March hares running amok on the fields. The geese find themselves in the middle of a husk of boxing, tussling hares, alive with the frenzied instinct of breeding. It is a sign to move on. The weather has turned. With a fair wind blowing, "the race to the high Arctic is on". They journey 800 miles north. Ospreys travel 4000 miles to forests in Finland that contain spreads of good fishing ponds where the Brown Bears gather as well. It is an "angler's paradise." The Brown Bears know where they are and they gather and clamber up the tree towards the Osprey eating fish. The Osprey is a messy eater and leaves behind scraps – just the perfect snack for a hungry bear.



In Holland, over land reclaimed from the salt marshes, the Grey Cranes are canny to avoid the wind turbines where there earlier were windmills. Migratory birds have to be adaptable in Europe. The cranes have a "special appointment" to keep in a patch of marsh in Sweden. It is the most important event in a crane's calendar. For the parents, it is time to renew their vows while the youngsters search for soul-mates. One solitary young crane dances to win heart. He intensifies effort in

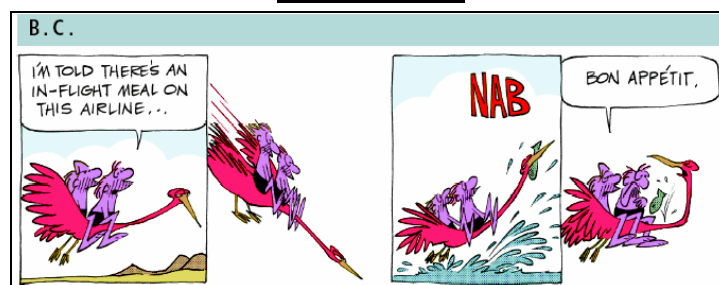
remarkable vertical loops and the two perform a synchronized dance in which they tie the knot. In Svalbard archipelago, midway between Norway and the Arctic, the Barnacle Geese have found home. In Europe's farthest wilderness, the geese mate and lay eggs in the 24-hour daylight. In Germany, the male storks are still waiting in their nests. Where are the girls? Whole flocks can get lost in the sea on the way from Africa. Migration is dangerous. One male looks up to the skies, searching, and spots what he has been waiting for! A flock of female storks flying in! He cannot control his excitement and he clatters out a greeting. The other male storks join him. The female storks drop down to their nests and the journey is complete. They are together again after eight months of separation to begin a life together.



In Svalbard, the geese have an unexpected baby boom and little chicks scurry on the tundra. But, wandering, intruding, preying Polar bears eat stray chicks and can wipe out an entire colony. The geese are frantic and they scurry to protect their young from a hulking bear who has walked into the colony. The gaggle of geese is joined by Arctic Terns and Skuas who ward off the bear with persistent, noisy attacks. The irritated, disgruntled bear beats a retreat and the geese are safe with their young.

Despite the ever-present threat of the looming, lumbering Polar Bear, the Barnacle Geese are safe from human intrusion in the Arctic – something they are desirous to avoid. They are unlike the storks who deliberately seek humans out as they mate and hatch their young "in a continent that we have changed more than any other."

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 10-09-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Spotted Dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*)




Spotted Dove (Sainikpuri, 11-04-2010)

Order: Columbiformes
Family: Columbidae
Genus: *Spilopelia*
Species: *S. chinensis*
Size: 28-32 cm

Description & distribution: The Spotted Dove is a small dove with a relatively long tail, and a common resident breeder across the Indian subcontinent and South-east Asia. It has also established feral populations in many parts of the world after being introduced. In different parts of its range, the Spotted Dove is found in a wide variety of habitats including woodland, scrub, farmland, gardens and parks. In India, it tends to be found more in moister areas, with the Laughing Dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*) being commoner in drier areas.

Formerly included in the genus *Streptopelia* along with turtle-doves, a 2001 study showed that based on molecular sequence and vocalization, the Spotted Dove and the Laughing Dove stood apart from the other taxa then included in *Streptopelia*, which led to subsequent authors splitting them into a separate genus. Several races are recognized based on plumage and size variation. The nominate form *S. chinensis*, from China (Canton), is buff brown below, shading to grey on the head, while the back has brown feathers. There is a white-spotted black collar patch on the back and sides of the neck. Tail tips are white and wing coverts have light buff spots. The Indian race, *S. c. suratensis*, and the Sri Lankan race, *S. c. ceylonensis* have fine buff or rufous spots on the back. The lesser and median wing-coverts have rosy- or buff-spotted tips, divided by a widening dark-grey streak along the shaft; these are not seen in the northern and eastern populations. The centre of the abdomen and the vent are white. The white tips of the outer tail feathers become

visible on take-off. Sexes are similar, but juveniles are duller and acquire the neck-spots only after they are mature. Individuals also tend to be smaller towards the south.

Behaviour & distribution: The Spotted Dove is usually seen in pairs or in small groups. It is usually seen on the ground while foraging for seeds and grain, or on low branches. From the ground, they fly off with an explosive flutter, and the flight is quick, with regular wing-beats and an occasional sharp flick of the wings. They also show a display flight, including a steep take-off with a loud clapping of the wings, followed by a slow glide down with the tail spread out; males also coo and bow as part of the courtship. The tendency to flush into the air when disturbed makes them a hazard on airfields. Its diet consists mainly of grass seeds, grain, fallen fruits and seeds of other plants. Occasionally, they also pick up insects, winged termites etc. The call is a soft cooing, which sounds like *Krookruk-krukroo... kroo kroo kroo*, with quite a lot of variation in the number of terminal *kroos*. One sample may be heard here. 

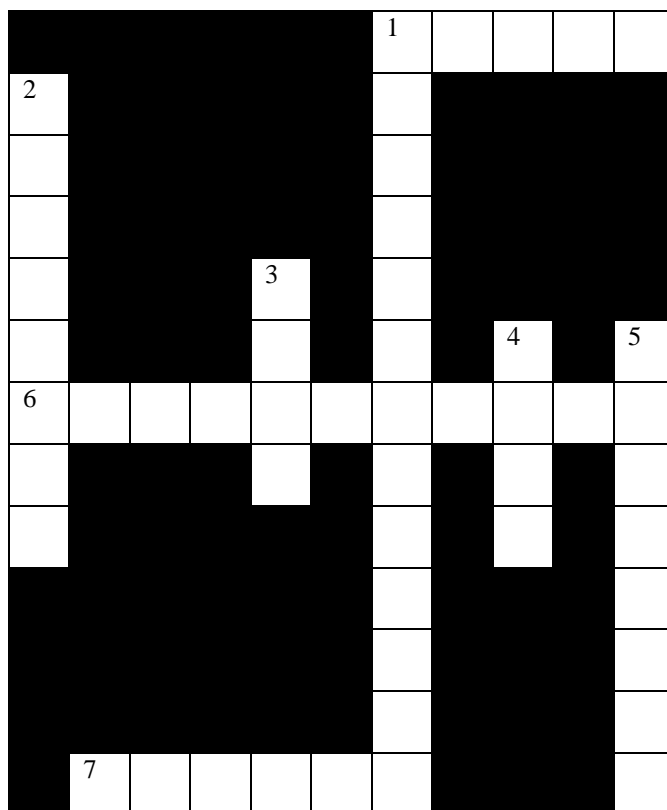
Nesting: The breeding season of the Spotted Dove is spread out in warm regions, but tends to be in the summer in temperate regions. The nests, flimsy cups of twigs, are sometimes placed on the ground or in buildings, but generally they are built in low vegetation. Both parents take part in nest-building, incubation and feeding duties. The typical clutch is 2 whitish eggs, and the pair may raise more than one brood.

Local name: It is known as 'chitroka', 'parki' or 'panduk' in Hindi, 'poda bellaguvva' or 'chukkala guvva' in Telugu and 'pulli pura' or 'mani pura' in Tamil.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #14

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 1 - Where the bird sits on a type of fish (5)
6 - Is it worth it to hate this bird? (11)
7 - Trader produces this bird (6)

DOWN

- 1 - Her lair diminishes rapidly on seeing this worrier (6,7)
2 - Osho endlessly stares open-mouthed at these birds? (8)
3 - This bird almost makes news (4)
4 - I or an article? (4)
5 - Staring at a learner makes this bird ready (8)

Solutions to Crossword #13 (Pitta, January 2013)

ACROSS: 2 – SPARROWHAWK, 6 – PIPIT, 7 – LAMMERGEIER

DOWN: 1 – BRAMBLING, 3 – PELICAN, 4 – WATERHEN, 5 – PLUMAGE

For Private Circulation Only

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 3 March 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 3rd March 2013, 6.30AM: ICRISAT, Patancheru

ICRISAT is one of the richest birding spots around the city and a winter visit here is near mandatory. It boasts of a varied habitat with lakes, fields, ponds, grasslands, etc., and this makes for a varied species list. ICRISAT may give us Wire-tailed Swallows, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and Yellow-wattled Lapwings, besides the water birds, a few raptors and some bush birds as well. This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

Trip Report – Fox Sagar (Jeedimetla Cheruvu) – 16th Feb. 2013

Text & photos: Humayun Taher

“Rare Yellow-billed Stork seen in Fox Sagar!” was the caption given below a photograph of a Painted Stork in a local Hyderabad daily. The description notwithstanding, it was the start of a chain of events that eventually led to the trip to Fox Sagar by some of us on 16th February.

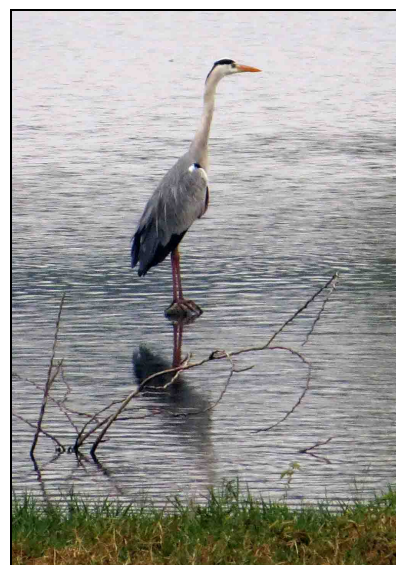
I knew Fox Sagar well. In the early days of the BSAP, in the latter part of the 1980s, this little lake was a gem, nestling in the midst of the vast acreage of the Jeedimetla Kancha (Grassland). Harriers used to roost in large numbers in these grasslands. Osprey were regularly sighted at Fox Sagar. In those days the lake was pristine and largely unspoiled, and was a regular visiting spot for the members of the BSAP.

Towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, this once pristine habitat started to get encroached upon to an alarming extent. The vast grasslands were reclaimed by plotting, and houses and tenements started to come up around the place. The excessive drainage of the soil soon turned the lake into a morass of mud and garbage. Once the water fled, so too did the winged inhabitants. Consequently, the place went off the BSAP radar and, for many a day, about the only response to anyone suggesting a trip to this place was a general comment deriding the suggestion - “Oh! There’s nothing left there...!”

But it seems that nature can be thwarted, but never completely routed. Certainly if the ‘Yellow-billed Stork’ was any indication, it seemed to suggest that the lake was coming alive again. Perhaps then, it was time to revisit and see what was to be seen. The suggestion came from Shafaatsaab; and not loth to investigate promising material, I decided to join in the planned expedition. Bindu expressed herself also willing to come along with us and so, early morning of the 16th February saw the

three of us driving along the old now-not-so-familiar road to the lake.

After taking directions from certain worthy citizens, we at last located the road that led to the lake. Finding a very passable road that seemed to run parallel to the bund but at a much lower level, we drove slowly along, looking for a spot from which we could ascend the bund. Almost at once we had our first interesting sighting. At the gates of what appeared to be some species of farmhouse, there were a couple of sacks of what looked like grain. Some of this had spilt on the road and partaking of this feast were a pair of Grey Francolin, accompanied by three Indian Pond Herons, a group of remarkably healthy-looking Spotted Doves and a single Grey Wagtail.



Grey Heron

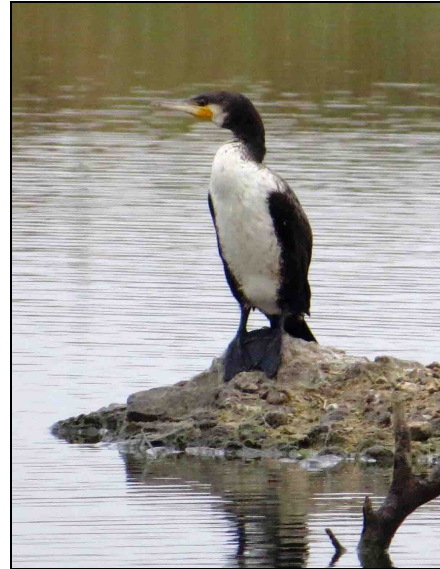
Soon after, we discovered what seemed to be a small footpath leading to the top of the bund. So, after a bit of steep climbing, I attained the top of the bund and looked once more upon the waters of the Fox Sagar lake; for water there certainly was! The lake was not quite full; but it was not empty either. There was a considerable sheet of water before me. And what is more, there were birds in fair numbers, scattered all over the place.

A small raft of ducks floated right in the middle of the lake. Owing to the overcast conditions and the distance, we could not ascertain exactly what species they were. However, a couple of Ruddy Shelducks, floating nearby were easier to identify. There were Grey Herons in almost incalculable numbers, all around the margins of the lake. Vociferous River Terns flew all around the place; Common Coots, White-breasted Waterhens and Little Grebes were described; Pond Herons added their own presence; a few Glossy Ibis flew overhead. Some small waders were to be seen on the far shore. And, just as the papers had said, there were four 'Yellow-billed Storks' foraging in the shallows on the far side. Certainly it seemed that Fox Sagar had been reborn.

The jarring note came from the fact that the lake now appeared to be a sort of fish-pond. There were large nets stretched across the lake in different directions. A few people on small rafts rowed across the lake and seemed to know exactly what they were doing. An old man whom we interviewed here told us that we could obtain very fine fresh fish direct from the lake just as soon as the fishermen brought in their catch. It seemed therefore that the lake was being artificially maintained as a source of livelihood for the fisherfolk whose village we could descry on the Eastern margin, close to the high-water mark.

An old building, shaped like a dome, built into the water and connected to the bund by an iron plank seemed to be some sort of pump-house. We walked across to investigate and discovered that it was indeed of a venerable age, complete with a set of wheels that seemed to be connected to an old outlet gate for the waters in the days when the lake was used for agriculture along its margins. Now alas, the watermark seemed to be considerably lower than the venerable old portcullis, and it is doubtful if any of the water is being used for anything other than pisciculture. There were certainly no very extensive fields around the place, as I remembered from the old days.

We had come to this place to not only observe the birdlife but also to perform the Asian Waterfowl Census operations. So we started along a little side road that skirted the eastern side of the lake and we could see some interesting sightings. I will not enumerate the entire list, but some I cannot pass mention. Foremost of these were the Cormorants.



Great Cormorant

There were more than 200 Great Cormorants on these waters. They were in large groups scattered here and there; several showing the immaculate white shirt-front of the juvenile stage. A considerable group of waders consisting mostly of Wood and Common Sandpipers were another interesting sighting. A small pod of Little Stints also warranted some interest.



Garganey

A group of about 9 Garganeys, accompanied by a single drake Northern Shoveler, swam serenely about on the far shores. But most interesting of all were the River Terns. There were dozens of them all over the place. On the Southern shores, large marker stones had been driven into the water and almost every stone seemed to have been appropriated by a River Tern. There they sat, sometimes taking off and sweeping over the water before returning to the stone of their choice. Grey Herons were in almost incredible numbers; close to a hundred of these birds were scattered all over the place, some in groups and some by themselves. A very large flock of Glossy Ibis flew over the lake; I could count some 70-odd birds in this one flock.



Common Kingfisher



Baya Weaver

Pied, White-breasted and Common Kingfishers patrolled the waters. There were Common Coots in very large numbers also and a few Black-winged Stilts and Common Moorhens. A small flock of Baya Weavers was seen on this Southern end of the lake, close to a small settlement. The full list of birds seen here is given later.

It seems clear now that this lake has once again come into its own. I do not think it will ever recover the grandeur of its youth, and certainly the fishing nets of the fishermen must be taking a small toll of the diving birds such as the Coots, Cormorants and Grebes. However, there is potential here for the place to become a better reserve.

There is a stand of Eucalyptus trees on the shores and, if this betokens the presence of a forest nursery, then it could become important for both resident and migrant waterfowl. Our survey seems to suggest that we would do well to keep an eye on this re-emerging lake and see how we can best help to protect and preserve it in the years ahead.

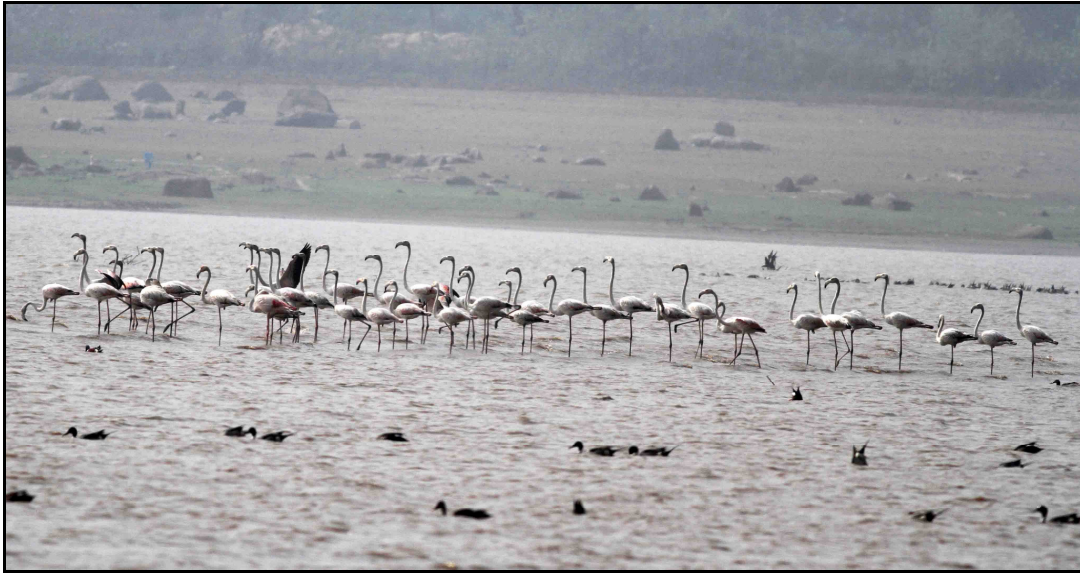
The list of birds sighted is given below:

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
1	R	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	
2	R	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	
3	R	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>	
4	R	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	
5	R	Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	NT
6	R	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	
7	R	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	
8	R	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
9	R	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	
10	R	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	
11	R	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	
12	R	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	NT
13	R	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	
14	M	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	
15	R	Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	
16	M	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	
17	M	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	
18	R	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	
19	R	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	
20	R	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	
21	R	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	
22	R	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	
23	R	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>	

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
24	R	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	
25	R	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	
26	R	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	
27	M	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	
28	M	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	
29	M	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	
30	R	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	
31	R	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	
32	R	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>	
33	R	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	
34	R	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	
35	R	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	
36	R	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	
37	R	Asian Palm-swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	
38	R	House Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	
39	R	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	
40	R	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	
41	R	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	
42	R	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	
43	R	Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	
44	M	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
45	R	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	
46	R,M	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	
47	R	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	
48	M	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea cinerea</i>	
49	R	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	
50	R	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>	
51	R	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus</i>	
52	R	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	
53	R	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	
54	R	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	
55	M	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	
56	R	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	
57	R	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	
58	R	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	
59	R	Brahminy Starling	<i>Temenuchus pagodarum</i>	
60	M	Rosy Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>	
61	R	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	
62	R	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	
63	R	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	

Trip Report – Osman Sagar (Gandipet) – 9th February 2013

Text: Surekha Aitabathula; Photos: Premjit L Rao



Greater Flamingo flock

FLAMINGOS IN HYDERABAD?

Absolutely yes! And brace yourself. About 250 of them! The birds were first sighted on 6th January this year by Shafaat, Humayun, Anjali and Ishrat who went to Osman Sagar for the annual Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC). Besides birding on beaten tracks, our famous four went a little exploratory by driving cross country through the narrowest lanes in villages and followed bullock cart tracks. Success and thrill arrived big time, when they reached reasonably close to the back waters of the lake and there it was, the mother of all surprises! Two hundred and fifty Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)! They also spotted about 600 Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*), 150 Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*), plenty of ducks, 80 per cent amongst which were Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*). Jaw-dropping numbers, aren't they?



Bar-headed Geese

Now flamingos have been sighted in Hyderabad in the past, but sighting 250 of them is certainly rare. Word spread about this great sighting and first off the block was Hemant who has taken some really good pictures of the elegant birds. The news about the flamingos then went viral and lots of birders made a beeline to the now sought-after birding site. The media too stepped in, what with some newspapers publishing photos of the flamingos.

Another small group of us visited the self-same spot on 9th February and, believe me, we were richly rewarded with the highlight of course being the flamingos. Flamingos inhabit warm and watery regions. They favour environments like estuaries, saline or alkaline lakes. Their bent bills allow them to feed on small organisms - plankton, tiny fish and fly larvae. In mud flats or shallow water, they use their long legs and webbed feet to stir up the bottom. They then bury their bills, or even their entire heads, and suck up both mud and water to access the edible morsels within. A flamingo's beak has a filter-like structure to remove food from the water before the liquid is expelled. Shrimp-like crustaceans are responsible for the flamingo's pink color. The birds pale in captivity unless their diet is supplemented. Interestingly, the Greater Flamingo's diagnostic pink tinge is much lesser than that seen on the Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*). They essentially live and breed in groups. The pair takes turns incubating its single egg. Young flamingos are born grey and white and do not turn pink till two years of age.



Black-tailed Godwit flock

We also spotted Black-tailed Godwits. Godwits are large wading birds. The most distinctive features are their very long, mud-probing beaks and the long legs. Females are bigger and heavier than the males, with noticeably longer beaks.



Bar-headed Geese (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Bar-headed Geese were lining the edge of the lake. The call is short and clear which sounded like the autorickshaw horn to me! The twin bars on the head are strikingly black, like the neat paint strokes on the faces of sports fans in stadiums. The species has been reported as migrating south from Tibet, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Russia before crossing the Himalayas.

We also saw Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers (*Anas clypeata*) and Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*). The upending Northern Pintails' feeding frenzy was an interesting feature to note. As it upends for food, the upper half of the duck completely immerses in water and the undercarriage looks like a pristine white triangle with a long needle pointing straight towards the sky. They nest on the ground. Although they walk well on land, they are excellent swimmers too. They fly with wings slightly swept back, rather than straight out from the body like other ducks.

The Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) wears a necklace that breaks in the middle of its breast, so to say. The black line that runs around its neck doesn't join at the breast. There appears a clean break which is diagnostic of the Kentish. Broken necklace bird!



Little Stint

The Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) with its dark eye and darker beak is an oh-so-fragile wader who feeds so daintily.

We also saw Common Teals (*Anas crecca*), Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) and twenty Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (*Merops philippinus*) on one single tree, with four of them sitting very close to each other in a row (like Bee-eaters generally seem to do). Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), Painted Stork, Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*), Black-tailed Godwits, Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*), Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*), Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) and Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) were also there.



Little Ringed Plover

And so it was a most enjoyable birding trip, made all the more interesting and exciting with the honorable presence of the visiting dignitaries - the pink and elegant Greater Flamingos.

Report - Indoor Meeting – 21st February 2013

UNDERSTANDING BIRD FLIGHT

This month we had an interesting talk by Wg Cdr Y Prakash Rao (Retd) on various aspects of Bird Flight. Thanks to wide publicity by the BSAP and the German Centre through the print media, it was a houseful affair!

Wg Cdr Rao is a helicopter pilot who served in the Indian Air Force for over 23 years. He took to bird watching a decade ago, and this talk was the culmination of mixing business with pleasure! Extending the knowledge of aerodynamics and related aspects from aircraft to birds, he explained various phenomena of bird flight. The presentation was well-supported with models, specimens, diagrams, images and videos to enable easy understanding of this diverse subject.



Three F-111s with different wing configurations

The talk began with a refresher of basic understanding of Physics and introduction of certain terms used in aerodynamics. This was followed by the suitability of a bird to fly and the construction of the bird feathers and the wing.



Down stroke



Up stroke

Thereafter, flight controls on an aircraft and a bird were compared, with a detailed explanation of stalling of wings. This was followed by flapping wing flight, take-offs & landings. Effect of winds on flight was well-explained with illustrations and videos.



Touching down



Reducing wing tip vortex

Certain common features of lift augmentation like expanding the wing area, curving the wings, deploying the Alula wing were discussed with the help of images. Other observations like folding of wings in a dive, upward bending of the primary feathers, flying low over water by certain water birds, hovering and formation flight were explained.



Dive



Flying low over water

At the end, the risks of flightlessness were illustrated vividly. The talk lasted for a little over 100 minutes with sufficient time for questions and answers. In all, it was a very interesting and a thought provoking talk. For the benefit of those who missed the talk, the same is posted at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNwyoyhtDw0>

Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills – 17th Feb. 2013

Text & photos: Venkat P



We assembled at Panjagutta, and started from there as a relatively small group of six; three of us were first-timers for a BSAP field trip. All of us being beginners, we tried harder to spot and identify the birds, which made it an

even more exciting trip for us. We managed to spot and identify some birds, could not identify some, and many birds - we could not even spot!

Here is the list of birds we spotted at Anantagiri Hills:

1. Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*)
2. Changeable Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*)
3. Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*)
4. Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*)
5. Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*)
6. Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
7. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
8. Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
9. Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
10. Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)
11. Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*)
12. Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*)
13. Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)
14. Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striatus*)
15. Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*)
16. Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*)
17. Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)
18. White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*)
19. Blue-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*)
20. White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*)
21. Common Iora (*Aegithinia tiphia*)
22. Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*)
23. Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)
24. Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)
25. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*)
26. Tawny-bellied Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*)
27. White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*)
28. Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*)



Coppersmith Barbet in the nest



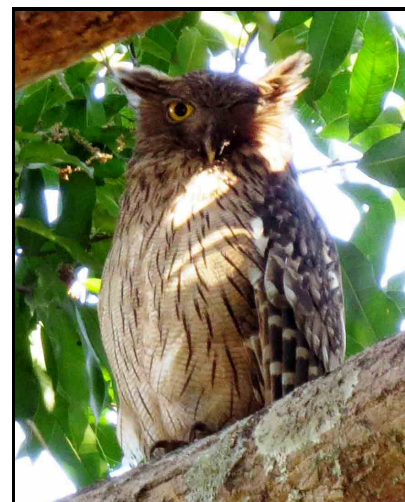
Orange-headed Thrush (Photo: KR Gurukumar)

Birds that we could not positively identify included:

1. 3-4 different Warblers;
2. A sparrow-like bird with black head, black/grey mantle and a thick black band from the throat down the centre of a white belly – later suggested to be a Great Tit (*Parus major*);
3. A bird with a scaly breast (as seen in Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*), and a bill and tail like in warblers – later suggested to be a female Blue-capped Rock Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*);
4. A Green Pigeon – later identified as a Yellow-footed Green Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*)



Blue-faced Malkoha



Brown Fish Owl

When returning, we spotted three Asian Paradise-flycatchers right where the steps end and the trail starts – a great way to end the trip.



Asian Paradise-flycatcher (Left - Female, Right – Male)

A Convergence Of Birders

Text: Sharada Annamaraju; Photos: Asif Husain

The British journalist and birder Simon Barnes once said, “We look to birds for a very deep-seated kind of joy. It goes back to the dawn of humankind: ever since humans first walked upright. They were able to turn their eyes to the heavens and observe birds.”

And so the members of BSAP meet once a month, sometimes more, to traipse through varied landscapes in bullish heat or on numbing cold mornings at unearthly hours in search of this joy. Once a year, we also meet in civilization, for the Society’s annual dinner; on this occasion at the Secunderabad Club Sailing Annexe on 23rd February 2013. Surekha Aithabathula insisted the event ought to be called a flocktail. Shorn of our standard issue birding uniforms of tee-shirts in earthy hues, bush hats and sturdy footwear, we turned up looking like the everyday people we are in more formal clothes. Our postures were upright, sans the slouchy shoulders bearing heavy backpacks, binoculars and cameras. And, if enthusiasm is anything to go by, we had our members Ashok from Nizamabad and Vikram Penmetsa travelling in from Vishakhapatnam to join us on the occasion!

Gracing the evening with their presence were also Mr Chandra Mohan Reddy, Additional Commissioner (Urban Biodiversity), Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation; Mr Shankaran, the curator of Nehru Zoological Park; Mrs Frauke Quader, founder of Save the Rocks Society and Mrs Anees Taher, wife of the Late Mr Siraj Taher of the BSAP.



Dr Suhel Quader addressing the gathering

Our guest of honour for the evening was Dr Suhel Quader, Senior Scientist at Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore and Head of the Citizen Science program at National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru. He commenced the successful MigrantWatch program under the aegis of NCBS in 2007 and currently also oversees SeasonWatch, a citizen science program to track climate change through observing tree cycles. His previous stints have been at the Royal Society for Protection of Birds as a research biologist in 2006 and as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Cambridge in United Kingdom prior to that. His association with the Birdwatchers’ Society of Andhra Pradesh has been a long standing one, having been a member since he was a twelve year old growing up in Hyderabad.

Over the past few years, the number of avid birders and bird photographers has been swelling. The success of MigrantWatch has been testimony to this phenomenon as has the establishment of several new birding clubs and groups. Coimbatore alone has three. Add to it, a burgeoning number of outfits offering birding tours, establishment of 'birding lodges', blogs and websites dedicated solely to bird photography.

A spurt has also been noticed in records coming in from amateur birders and photographers on sightings and range extensions in scientific journals. Similarly, that the onus to exercise scientific sensibilities and meticulousness in keeping records to aid ornithology could lurk in all of us birdwatchers, was what Dr Quader emphasised on in his talk at the gathering, 'Birding to Make a Difference'.

While as citizen scientists we might not be able to see the end use, but Dr Quader mentioned several examples of how our contributions to websites like migrantwatch.in and ebird.org help generate intensive data. As birders, we are widespread and more in number than field biologists. Using an example of a birder's records from Maharashtra, Dr Quader demonstrated how the Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, a resident species within the subcontinent turns ubiquitous in some parts of the year in some places, disappears or dwindles from there and disperses to other locations during rest of the year. Data therefore, not only helps understand migrants, but also the habits, numbers and patterns of commonly seen resident species.

Another example of citizen science we were given was of maps from the United States documenting the spread and population ascent of the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, an introduced species in the Americas which quickly adapted and rapidly spread across the country to be regarded as an agricultural pest. In contrast, numbers have plummeted in India, also demonstrated through records from birdwatchers. The highly informative talk led to some introspection and resolve amidst us birders present at the talk to move on from mere birding for pleasure to record and contribute as much as possible to citizen science.



Dr Suhel Quader receiving a memento

Towards the end of the talk, BSAP member Mr Raghavendra's twin seven-year-old sons Siddhant and Vedant (dressed in matching clothes!) ambled up and presented a memento to Dr Quader.

Perhaps as an ominous sign of how birders need to be more involved in conservation and science, the memento presentation was followed by Aasheesh Pittie announcing grim news brought in by Mr Shankaran. Roughly 490 birds of 20 different species including buntings, parakeets, pipits, owls and starlings were rescued that morning in a raid at Murghi (Mehboob) Chowk by the State Forest Department.

Somewhere towards the final part of the talk, on an odd cue, the attendants around the buffet table decided to uncover dishes heaped with scrumptious continental cuisine and those of us seated close to the buffet table were in agony, as our attentions lurched towards dinner.

Our trip reports have checklists of birds; I now offer you highlights of the dinner spread. We began with Lasagna, ploughed our way through Chicken with Brown Sauce, Corn and Spinach Bake, a fragrant Pulav and rounded the remains of the evening with Trifle Pudding. The lentils and rice lay largely ignored. Suffice to say, there were no sandwiches or idlis made hastily, bleary eyed at 4 a.m. involved in the proceedings here. But the warmth and happiness in sharing a meal whether under a tree in a forest after a hectic day of birding, or in the Sailing Annexe on a spring evening with your flock, is the most heartening thing ever.



A section of the audience

Some observations on the probable display behaviour of the Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*)

Anjali Pande (with inputs from Humayun Taher)



Small Pratincole (Photo: Humayun Taher)

During the Bird Race on 3rd February 2013, we had been to Ameenpur Lake. It was a little past noon. Here we saw lots of Small Pratincoles (*Glareola lactea*) which were very active, flying constantly in their zigzag way with speed, taking those famous abrupt turns, catching insects while on the wing and hardly settling down on the ground. As usual they were in large numbers. Occasionally, they would suddenly settle down on the ground at the edge of the water, where the ground was still wet but not marshy.

And then we saw a very interesting display-type behaviour. With wings spread out, hovering in the air, its feet almost touching the ground, one bird kept hovering on one particular spot. There were more Pratincoles also but they were sitting on the ground. Then one more bird started flying in a similar manner. Both birds did not sit on the ground - they remained in the air, kept jumping and flying without ever closing their wings, touching the ground with their feet very briefly - almost as if they were hanging from some spring or elastic. At no time did they rise more than about 6 inches from the ground.

Humayun mentioned the fact that this could be their courtship display, as it was both times performed by a bird which was accompanied by another one. And from the demeanour of the displaying birds, it seemed likely they were trying to impress their chosen mate.

Looking for more information on this, I came across a very informative page on Delhibird by Job Joseph:

http://speciesguide.delhibird.net/internal/31/pratincole_general.htm.

After reading it, I realised that Small Pratincoles indulge in many displays! The common one is sometimes called the Distraction Display. But in the case of our birds I do remember observing the pale grey crown and the "more greyishness" overall on the birds, so what we saw were probably birds in their breeding plumage. Since the breeding season for the Small Pratincole is mentioned as February to April, we may have actually seen the Courtship Display rather than the Distraction Display.

On the other hand, it is possible that due to our presence nearby, the birds indulged in Distraction Display. We kept a safe distance and watched them only through binoculars, but they may have become alarmed, especially if there was any nesting activity going on in the area. The problem is that because the sexes are alike, we could not say if the displaying birds were males and the watching birds were females. But I watched the two birds particularly flying around and, close by, 2-3 other birds. Those 2-3 individuals seemed to be not paying attention and, interestingly, they were not at all alarmed nor did any bird fly away. So I do believe that we saw the Courtship Display behaviour rather than a Distraction Display.

This note is just to share information and to see if anyone else can add any inputs on this behaviour.

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)



Common Kingfisher

Order: Coraciiformes
Family: Alcedinidae
Genus: *Alcedo*
Species: *A. atthis*
Size: 15-16 cm

Description & distribution: The Common Kingfisher is a small bird with the typical kingfisher shape – short tail, dumpy body, large head and long bill. It has a greenish-blue head, scapulars and wings, a white blaze on neck and throat, orange ear coverts and underparts, and an electric-blue or turquoise ‘flash’ down its back which is more easily visible when seen in flight from behind. The legs and feet are bright orange, and the bill is long and blackish. The female is similar to the male, except for the lower mandible, which is orange-red with a black tip. The juvenile is also similar, though with duller colours. Seven subspecies are recognized, differing mainly in the hue of the upperparts, and the intensity of the rufous on the underparts.

A resident breeder across most of its range in Asia, Europe and parts of North Africa, it may still migrate from areas where rivers freeze in winter. It is most often seen near fresh water bodies like clear, slow-flowing rivers and streams, or near lakes with well-vegetated banks, though it is also present in mangroves and, in winter, near the seashore. Its presence is a good indicator

of the health of fresh water bodies and the quality of water. Measures to replace natural banks with artificial ones and improve the flow of water disrupt this habitat, as this greatly cuts down the populations of fish, amphibians and aquatic reptiles.


Behaviour: The Common Kingfisher, like all kingfishers, must eat around 60% of its body weight every day. This requires control of a suitable stretch of water, as a result of which it is highly territorial. It is solitary for most parts of the year, even roosting alone in heavy cover. In autumn, pairs form but each bird retains separate territories, generally around 1 km long; these are not merged until spring. In territorial fights, both birds may display aggressively, and one bird would try to catch the other’s beak and hold it under water.

It frequents bushes with branches hanging close to the shallow open waters in which it hunts; it may also be seen on posts or riverbanks which allow it to sit with bill pointing down as it looks for prey. Once food is detected, it bobs its head up and down to gauge the distance, and dives steeply to seize its prey, usually no deeper than 25 cm below the surface. The wings are opened under water and open eyes are protected by the transparent ‘third eyelid’. After catching the fish, the bird flies out of the water head first, and flies back to its perch to consume it.

Once perched, it adjusts the fish to hold it near the tail, beating it against the perch until it is dead, after which it positions the fish length-wise and swallows it head first. While the diet is mainly fish, it also catches aquatic insects like dragonfly larvae, water beetles and, in winter, crustaceans like shrimps. Several times a day, it regurgitates small grayish pellets of fish bones and other indigestible remains.

The big challenge for any diving bird is the change in refraction of light between air and water. The Common Kingfisher's eyes have two foveae (the area of the retina with the greatest density of light receptors), and it is able to switch from the central fovea to the auxiliary one when it enters water; a retinal streak allows the image to swing temporally as it swoops upon its prey. The positions of the foveae mean that the Common Kingfisher has monocular vision in air and binocular vision in water. It also has the ability to hover over the water while fishing.

The flight of the Common Kingfisher is fast, direct and usually low over water. The short, rounded wings 'whirr' rapidly as it flies, usually emitting its flight call, which is

a short, sharp whistle ('chee') repeated several times as it flies. Birds in anxiety emit a harsh 'shrit it it', and nestlings may ask for food with a 'churr' noise; however, the Common Kingfisher has no song. One sample of the flight call may be heard here. 

Nesting: The breeding season of the Common Kingfisher varies from place to place. The nest is in a burrow excavated by both partners in a low vertical riverbank or, sometimes, in a quarry, a hole in a wall or rotting tree stump, or in a termite mound. The gently-inclining burrow is around 60-90 cm long and ends in an enlarged chamber. The cavity is unlined but soon accumulates a litter of regurgitated pellets and fish remains. Both parents take part in incubation during the day, but only the female at night. The usual clutch is five to seven glossy white eggs, of which, typically, one or two fail to hatch as the parent cannot cover all of them. The pair may raise two, and sometimes three, broods in a season.

Local name: It is known as 'chhota kilkila' in Hindi, 'neela buchigadu' in Telugu and 'laghu meen rank' in Sanskrit.

Bird Humour

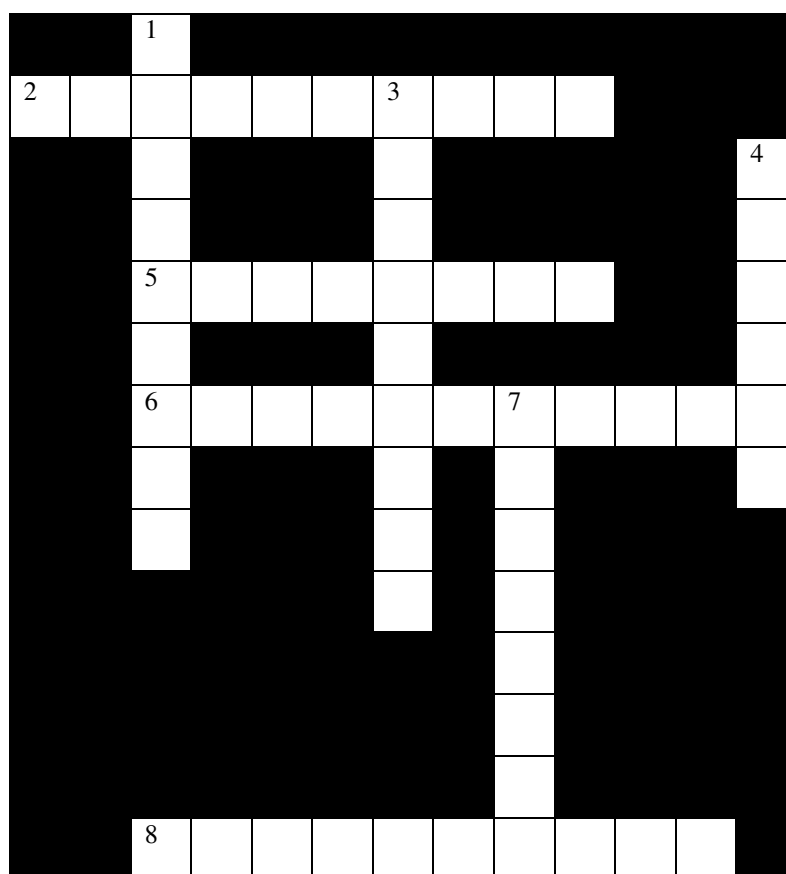


(From Times of India, 29-08-2012)

BIRDING CROSSWORD #15

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 2 - 'Neel-kanth', literally? (10)
5 - Vet finds a fault in this skulker (8)
6 - The Lata Mangeskar of birds? (11)
8 - This bird wears a precious stone on its neck (10)

DOWN

- 1 - Bighead takes it full on the chin! (9)
3 - Directionless trier never gets this bird (5,4)
4 - Duck jumps off the scooter to meet this water-bird! (6)
7 - Raj has a thing for this bird (8)

Solutions to Crossword #14 (Pitta, February 2013)

ACROSS: 1 – PERCH, 6 – WHITETHROAT, 7 – DARTER

DOWN: 1 – PALLID HARRIER, 2 - GOSHAWKS, 3 - SMEW, 4 – IORA, 5 - STARLING

For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 4 April 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 14th April 2013, 6.30AM: Nehru Zoological Park, Mir Alam.

Given the amount of green cover within its premises, it is no surprise that the zoo is actually quite a good place for bird watching. The various enclosures hold a lot of small ground and tree birds, as well as a number of water birds. Eurasian Thick-knees have been known to breed near the Sambhar enclosure. By March-April migrants begin their return migration, so one can also expect to see some stragglers. There have been several interesting sightings and observations in the past, and this trip should be no exception. This will be a half-day trip. Please carry plenty of water and snacks. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: BSAP BIRD PHOTO EXHIBITION. Inauguration: Monday, 22nd April 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

The BSAP Bird Photo Exhibition opens with an inauguration on 22nd April, coinciding with the INTERNATIONAL EARTH DAY. The Exhibition features bird photographs taken by some of our own members, and promises to be a showcase of the immense talent present in our Society. Therefore, please do make it a point to visit the Exhibition. After the inauguration, the Exhibition will be open to visitors between 9.30PM – 5.30PM, from 23rd April – 3rd May 2013.

CONFESSIONS OF AN INEPT BIRDWATCHER

Trip Report – ICRISAT – 3rd March 2013

Text: Arjun Surendra; Photos: Humayun Taher



As the alarm clock made enough noise to awaken half the neighborhood I struggled to get myself out of bed. As I cursed violently, giving Capt. Haddock competition, I could not quite remember why I was waking up at a time when I would usually be just getting into bed. Birding! That was it. It had been years since I had last indulged in the frustrating yet enjoyable pursuit of obtaining glimpses of our avian friends, and thus I was completely out of touch. As someone noted, it was not quite catching a glimpse that was the frustrating part,

but the identification that was usually taxing, even when I was in “practice”.

The trip this month was to ICRISAT, a wonderful place to get back into the “game”. Hitching a ride with Ms. Sarala Mahidhara and her niece Samyukta, we made our way from one corner of the city to the other. I took this opportunity to act like a typical “foren returned” chap and curse (yes, again) the volume of traffic at 6 ack emma on a Sunday morning.

Finally we were at ICRISAT, and thankfully for my co-passengers, my whining stopped. I was surprised when I looked at all the assembled members; there were very few familiar faces. I really had been away for way too long. In the confusion of trying to remember names, and match names to the faces, a raptor was seen, which remained unidentified. Not a great start to birding.

As the ICRISAT bus, which was to take us around the beautiful campus was delayed, it was decided that we walk down to our first stop, the campus pond. On the way however, we caught sight of a tree that seemed to be yielding a bumper crop of the Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) [it is after all a Crop Research Institute]. That evened up the odds a bit: 1-1, birds identified to birds not identified.



Black-crowned Night Heron

The bus arrived as we were invading the privacy of said Hornbills, and soon we were at the first stop, the campus pond. The pond yielded the usual suspects, such as the Indian Spot-billed ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) and so on. The reeds towards the end of the pond yielded a Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*); of course, this was identified by someone else, so score two to the birds. It has been a change from years gone by, where the same pond would have a wide variety of waterfowl. It may be due to the pond being deepened and cleared of weeds. In the vicinity, there are other ponds where the highlight was a Purple Swampphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) that seemed as if it were glowing, as the light hit it just right. Soon, irritated with all of us gawking shamelessly at it, the Swampphen retired into the reeds in a huff. Another

interesting sighting there was a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), which I initially confused for an Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeolagrayii*), before the red eye was pointed out to me. Score three to the birds. I think I should stop counting before I completely embarrass myself in print!



Common Moorhen

We then moved onto the edge of the Patancheru Lake. En route, a Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) was spotted as it settled down into a field. The Patancheru Lake lies outside the boundaries of ICRISAT on the other side of a chain link fence along which a *kachcha* road runs. On the other side of this road, we stopped adjacent to a small water body where we saw Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), White Ibis or if you prefer, the Black-Headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), and waders such as the Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) and Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*). A Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) was also spotted perching on a tree in the distance, as was our old friend, the White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*).

The best sighting on the Patancheru Lake was that of a dog that was attempting to hunt Black-winged Stilts. The Stilts proved too quick for our canine friend, and after a reasonable amount of persistence (by the dog), the Stilts flew away; the dog left soon after, disgusted and wet, and we moved on, thoroughly entertained.

In the distance, on a pole, a large raptor was seen, that was identified as a Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*). A Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) was also seen giving us a fly-past. A Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) proudly displayed his wings to us (Yes, I know he was just drying them off, thank you very much).



Greater Spotted Eagle

As we were about to get on the bus, another Marsh Harrier was spotted, once again landing.



Ruddy Shelduck

The bus drove on to the large lake on the campus. From the bus, we were able to see many Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and a River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*). We then retired to the shade of the gazebo and were soon deeply involved in my other favorite pastime - Eating. While eating, I happened to catch sight of the resident Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*).

After a nice breakfast and a group photo, we boarded the bus, to go on to the Red Lake. At the Red Lake, we saw some Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) nesting, and a few Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) some of which were dabbling, presenting their rear ends to our binoculars. Three more Spot-billed Pelicans were seen in the water. Perhaps our presence made them nervous, for they soon took flight, soaring above the lake.



Spot-billed Pelican

A few waders were seen in the fields opposite the lake, including some unidentified sandpipers, possibly Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*) - the inept birder strikes again! - and a Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*).

Soon it was time for us to go back to the gate, but the fun was not over yet; en route, I happened to see two birds that I could identify with some confidence. A Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) with its red "cap" was standing close to a Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) to offer a ready comparison, or was it like a spot-the-differences cartoon that you see in the Sunday papers?

The bus then deposited us at the gate, and after some quick goodbyes, it was time to go. I quite enjoyed my return to birding. Hopefully the first of many more!



Indian Peafowl

Report – HSBC HYDERABAD BIRD RACE – 3rd February 2013

Shafaat Ulla



Photo: Hemant Kumar

As we are all aware, the HSBC Bird Races have become yearly events and are held in about fifteen cities all over the country. Hyderabad of course is no exception and the fourth Hyderabad Bird Race was held during February this year. This wonderful and fun-filled event is supported and sponsored by HSBC, under the supervision of Sunjoy Monga of M/s Yuhina Eco-Media, Mumbai. Our society conducts and organises the races together with the Great Hyderabad Adventure Club (GHAC). It may be mentioned that it is open to all, and those who are not quite familiar with birds are helped out by experienced birders from our society. The idea is to have lots of fun and to be close to nature and enjoy different habitats around our city.

This year too, the race was a resounding success. A total of 103 persons participated, including 27 ladies and 4 children. The youngest was Siddharth, a bundle of energy and only four summers young! In all 27 teams could be formed, 25 teams in cars and 2 teams on four motor-bikes.



Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

The contestants started arriving from 6.30AM at the sprawling parking lot of Hotel 'The Square', Begumpet. The Hotel was also our Hospitality Partner for the race. Each

team was given a bird name as identification and a log book to record the list of birds seen. All team members were also given a breakfast hamper before being flagged off by about 7.30AM. The teams could go anywhere they wanted within a radius of about 25 to 30 km around Hyderabad, and were advised to return to the hotel latest by 6.00PM and submit their log books to the judges for their scrutiny.

While the teams were out, the organisers were busy making arrangements for the evening function and then waited patiently for the contestants to arrive.

It was a sight to see when they all started trooping in. Even though they looked a little haggard, they were all happy and jubilant and were seen excitedly comparing notes, even after twelve hours of solid birding. While the team members made a bee-line to the snacks and tea counter, which they all certainly deserved, the judges, Aasheesh and Moorty got down to the serious business of scrutinising the log books and ranking the teams based on the number of bird species recorded by each team.

After the judges finished their task, and after full justice done to the refreshments, the evening function started in right earnest. Dr. Aminuddin Khan, one of the oldest members of our society was the Chief Guest for the evening. He was led to the dais by Aasheesh, followed by Mr. Navin Bajaj of HSBC and Amardeep of GHAC. After these gentlemen were seated on the dais, the proceedings started with presentation of a memento to the chief guest by – yes, you guessed it – Siddharth! Aasheesh welcomed the gathering, followed by short speeches by Mr. Bajaj and Amardeep.

It was now high time to announce the winners, for which all were waiting impatiently with bated breath. The judges started announcing the winners and the Chief Guest handed over the prizes to the winners. The results were as follows:

First Prize: **RED MUNIAS** (Anand, Mahipal, Deepu, Neetha)
Total count: **155**
Bird of the Day: Eurasian Wryneck (Jynx torquilla)

Second Prize: **FALCONS** (Humayun, Anjali, Abhinava, Prasad)
Total count: **137**
Bird of the day: Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula)

Third Prize: **SHIKRAS** (Nishant, Trishla, Hemant, Mohan)
Total count: **111**
Bird of the day: Greater Flamingo (Phoenicopterus ruber)

Dr. Aminuddin congratulated the winners while giving away the prizes and wished all other participants better luck next year. It may be interesting to note that a total of 194 species of bird were seen during the race.

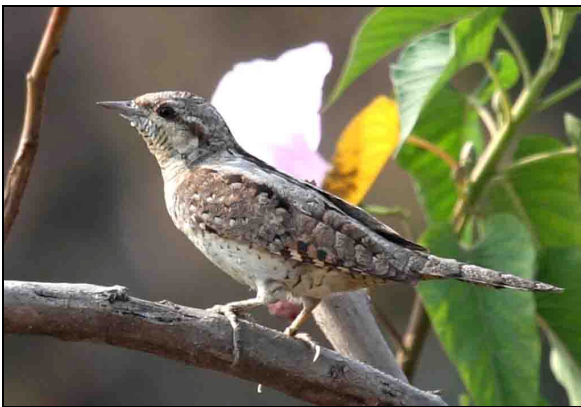
Now we were all waiting for the most interesting and fun-filled agenda: members of every team, all 27 of them, were invited to come up one by one and speak for a few minutes, sharing their experience of the day. First to start were, naturally, the Red Munias, followed by the others. It was a

very exciting session and we all enjoyed it thoroughly. The evening function came to an end, with Rashmi of GHAC giving a nice and comprehensive Vote of Thanks. As we were quite famished, we all moved to the terrace with a wonderful ambience where a sumptuous dinner was laid out and, needless to say, we did full justice to it.

A great day and a great evening came to an end. One by one everyone started leaving, after some bear hugs and warm hand-shakes and promises to return next year.

Write-up – Team RED MUNIAS

Text and photos: Anand Kalinadhabhatla



Eurasian Wryneck



Red Collared Dove

We first headed towards Narsapur forest to see the woodland birds. Along the way we stopped at agriculture fields and water bodies to cover as many places and habitats as possible. We saw many raptors including Crested Serpent Eagle, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Booted Eagle, Oriental Honey-buzzard, White-eyed Buzzard, Eurasian Marsh Harrier and Brahminy Kite at the Narsapur forest and Lake. There were a few pairs of Red Collared Doves roosting on Flame of the Forest trees close to the Narsapur Lake. Crested Treeswifts took off from their perch and entertained us with their sallies. A foraging Eurasian Wryneck, which was our bird of the day, was a close sighting. The bird allowed us to approach close and we had the opportunity to take some photographs.

Narsapur Lake was teeming with Waders and Ducks. There were Comb Ducks and Cotton Pygmy-geese in the shallows. There were about a dozen Tufted Ducks in the middle of the lake. Eurasian Wigeons and Northern Pintails were busy feeding. A Little Ringed Plover walked towards us, probably to lead us away from its nesting site. These birds seem to breed around Narsapur Lake regularly. Last year a chick was seen here. A flock of around 25 River Terns were roosting along the shore. It was a beautiful sight, watching so many of them at one place.



Black-tailed Godwit

We then traveled to Sangareddy Lake where Small Pratincoles tried to be invisible in the grass. Presence of male Ducks made the identification job easy. Garganey and Northern Shovelers were in good numbers here. Black-tailed Godwits were fighting for feeding territories. The real estate of the lake does not seem to be enough for the good number of birds present.



Small Pratincole

We then moved to the paddy fields around Manjeera reservoir. This favourite place of many bird watchers had hundreds of Weavers. Baya, Streaked and Black-breasted Weavers were all there. Black-headed and Red-headed Buntings joined the party of Weavers to gorge on the seeds. Black-headed, Black and Glossy Ibises showed up in large numbers in the marsh and wetlands.



Red Avadavat (Red Munia)

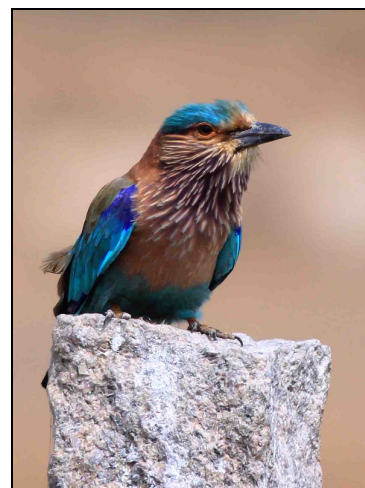
A mix of agriculture, water bodies, and marsh and woodland habitats resulted in a wide variety of birds. Red Munias were a happy flock with the company of birds of different feathers around them all through the day.

Write-up – Team FALCONS

Text: Humayun Taher; Photos: Hemant Kumar

As the sun started to make its presence felt, I wondered once again why I indulge in these strange activities... at my age, surely it would have been better to spend the Sunday curled up on the sofa with a good book, the fan making its presence felt and perhaps a soothing cup of the vital oolong at my elbow. Then again, as the adult male Asian Paradise Flycatcher fluttered out of the bushes, I thought... what an exquisite reward for giving up a Sunday to birding!

It was, of course, the BSAP HSBC Bird Race that had got me out on this warm morning, along with Prasad, Abhinava and Anjali, to the Narsapur Forest searching for elusive feathered critters to fill our log-books. This year, the ICRISAT Campus was outlawed so a considerable number of teams headed to Narsapur instead. We had a bit of a head-start and the Falcons (our team name) stooped first on the spot just behind the temple and thereby got a few birds in before the other groups started to arrive.



Indian Roller

Walking along the valley floor and observing as we went, we reached the backwaters of the Narsapur Lake, where was waiting our bird of the day: effectively disguised as a Tufted Duck! Also on offer were a few Common Pochards. Considering how low the count of Pochards has been this year, it is not to be wondered at that all four of us were charmed by their presence. The backwaters here appeared very rich in birdlife; we realized that perhaps we should spend more time at this place. The advantage of stopping here was revealed when we saw the Peregrine stooping at a White-eyed Buzzard; what a thrilling sight.



Small Minivet

Having notched up more than 85 species at this one site, we decided to check out the other side of the lake; which was quite disappointing actually. It revealed nothing new except an Oriental White-eye. So, rather than waiting around, we decided to tank up on something cool and then head to Ameenpur, which is generally fairly rewarding. Having sucked up a few soft-drinks and added a few flying Parakeets to the bag, we headed out to Ameenpur.



Little Egret

Using the Outer Ring Road, it was easy driving and we made it in less than 45 minutes. And sure enough, there was plenty to add at this spot. Black Ibis, Yellow Wagtails, Greenshanks, Small Pratincoles... the list goes on. Certainly I was well compensated for the discomfort of giving up the vital bohea and the snooze I had originally planned.



Great Cormorant

But now it was time to head back. After all, "getting" a total of 137 birds is all very well, but to be able to make them officially, the log books have to be handed over to the judges in good time. Plus the appalling traffic of Hyderabad and the hour now getting uncomfortably close to the end of the race. We made it just in time, handed over our sightings, learnt that we were second-best and so, thoroughly compensated for the trials and tribulations inseparable from a bird-race: what a wonderful way to spend a Sunday!

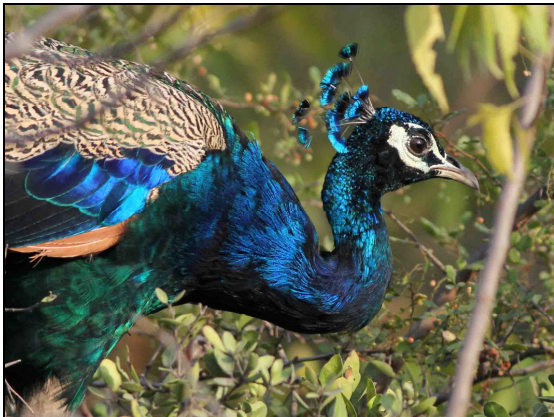
Write-up – Team SHRIKES

Text: Nishant Shah; Photos: Hemant Kumar

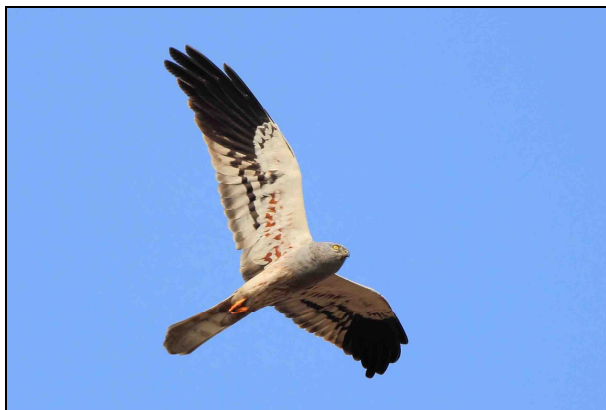
For the 2013 HSBC Bird Race, I formed the team Shrikes with Trishla, Hemant and Mohan. We had shortlisted some of the birding spots including ICRISAT and University of Hyderabad (UoH) for the race. However, we were disappointed that both ICRISAT and UoH were off limits. Nevertheless we hoped to spot a respectable number of species and with the aim to cross the 100 mark we made a route plan on the morning of 3rd Feb before the flag-off.



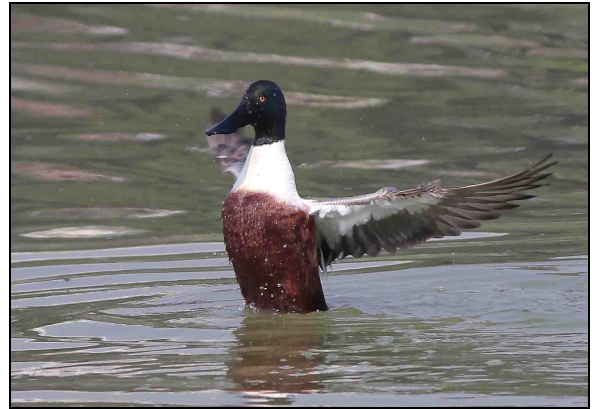
Black Ibis



Indian Peafowl

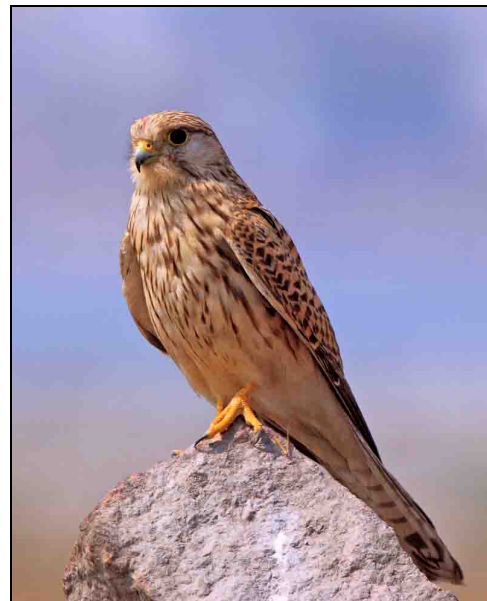


Montagu's Harrier



Northern Shoveler

KBR Park, Botanical Garden, Pragati Nagar Lake, Ameenpur, Gandipet and Mrugavani National Park were the places we covered. We had a slow start as the security guards at KBR Park and Botanical Garden were reluctant to permit us inside with binoculars and cameras. Despite the delay we were able to record 111 species in all. Besides the very common birds, some of the interesting birds we saw were Common Kestrel, Montagu's Harrier, Greater Flamingo, Blue Rock Thrush, Small Pratincole, Zitting Cisticola, Indian Grey Hornbill and the Greater Spotted Eagle. We marked the Greater Flamingo as our bird of the day.



Common Kestrel



Green Bee-eater

By the end of the day we were one happy team, as we thoroughly enjoyed our time and fulfilled our wishes. I was happy to have achieved my goal of crossing the 100 mark, Trishla wanted to win and reaching the 3rd spot was indeed delightful for her. Hemant on the other hand was very keen on photographing the birds and Mohan being a newbie got his dose of birding thrill.



Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark



Little Ringed Plover

Some other photos taken during the Bird Race:



Grey Heron



Brahminy Kite



White Wagtail



White-browed Wagtail



Asian Openbill

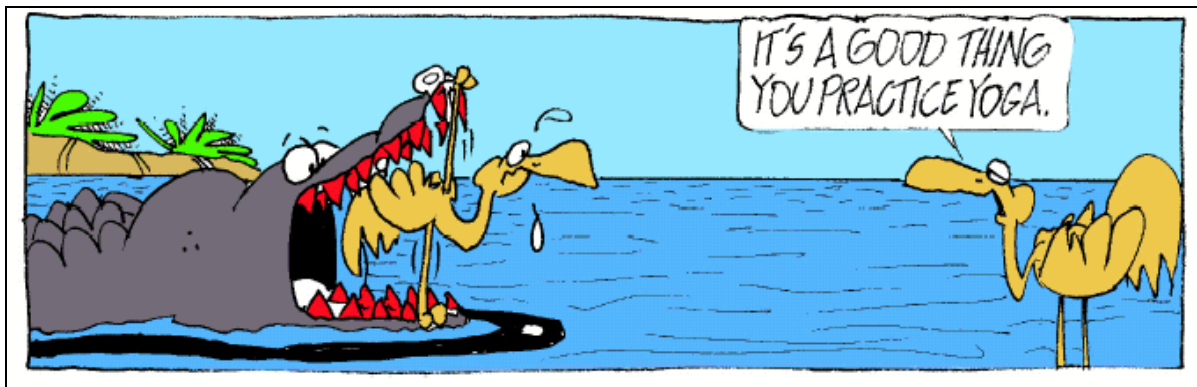


White-breasted Waterhen



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
(Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 29-09-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*)



Orange-headed Thrush

Left - *Z. c. citrina* (Kolkata, 06-05-2008) and Right - *Z. c. cyanotus* (Sainikpuri, 11-04-2010)

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Turdinidae

Genus: *Zoothera* (or *Geokichla*)

Species: *Z. citrina* (or *G. citrina*)

Size: 20-24 cm

Description & distribution: The Orange-headed Thrush is a small thrush. The male has uniform grey upperparts and wings, an orange head and underparts, and white median and undertail coverts. The bill is slate-grey, and the legs and feet are brown in front and pink or yellowish on the rear. The female has browner or more olive upperparts and warm brown wings. The juvenile bird is dull brown with grey wings, buff streaks on the back and a rufous cast to the face and head. The nominate race, *Z. c. citrina*, breeds in the region from northern India east along the Himalayas to eastern Bangladesh and, possibly, western and northern Myanmar. It winters in southern India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. *Z. c. cyanotus*, resident in southern India, has a white throat and sides to the face, with two dark stripes running downwards from below the eyes. *Z. c. amandoni* (not recognized by all) is seen in the north-eastern part of peninsular India (Madhya Pradesh and Orissa) and has longer wings and a brighter orange crown than *Z. c. cyanotus*. *Z. c. andamanensis* and *Z. c. albogularis*, resident in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands respectively, are markedly smaller in size than the mainland races.

The preferred habitat of the Orange-headed Thrush is moist, broad-leaved evergreen forests, with medium-density undergrowth of bushes and ferns. However, it is known to utilise bamboo forests and secondary growth, and is often found in damp areas, near streams or in shady ravines. Some of the sub-species are completely or partially migratory, and winter in habitat similar to its breeding areas but at lower altitude.

Behaviour: The Orange-headed Thrush is a shy, secretive bird that usually prefers to stay in the undergrowth, and will also feed on the ground in such undergrowth or other

thick cover, though it may occasionally venture out while foraging. It is most active at dawn and dusk as it probes the leaf litter for its diet of insects and their larvae, spiders, other invertebrates and fruit. It usually occurs alone or in pairs, but outside the breeding season, several birds may congregate if a good food source is found. It has a swift and silent flight, but when it senses a threat, it can sit motionless for a long time.

The Orange-headed Thrush has a variety of calls including a soft 'chuk', a screeching 'teer-teer-teer', and a thin 'tsee'. However, it is generally silent, especially in winter. It sings from a leafy perch, usually in the early morning or late afternoon. Its song consists of a series of lilting musical notes, repetitive in nature; it may also include imitations of other birds like babblers, bulbuls and the Common Tailorbird. Two samples may be heard here.

Nesting: The breeding season of the Orange-headed Thrush is between May and July. The nest is a wide, shallow cup of twigs, small roots, and bits of bark or bracken, lined with softer material like moss or leaves. At times, conifer needles have also been noted. The nest is built by both partners at a height of up to 4.5m in a small bush or tree. The Orange-headed Thrush seems to prefer mango trees or coffee bushes for the purpose. Incubation lasts for around 13-14 days, and the young birds leave the nest in around 12 days. The usual clutch is three to four (and occasionally five) eggs. The eggs are usually cream or tinted pale blue, grey or green, with pale lilac blotches and reddish-brown spots.

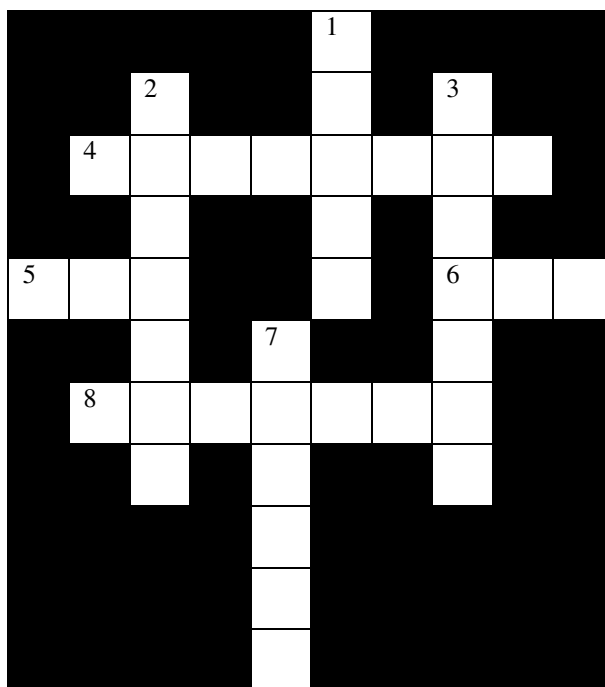
The Orange-headed Thrush is a host for the brood parasite Pied Crested Cuckoo, which lays a single egg in the nest of the thrush. The Chestnut-winged Cuckoo is also said to have done so.

Local name: It is known as 'safed gala kasturi' in Hindi, 'mampala chittu' in Tamil, 'narangi kasturo' in Gujarati and 'shwet-kanth bhu kasturika' in Sanskrit.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #16

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 4 - Would this bird groan on receiving a pat? (8)
- 5 - It has a beak (or a hooter)? (3)
- 6 - This bird is after coal, maybe (3)
- 8 - Flier Alice crashed in outer Pakistan (7)

DOWN

- 1 - Owlish utterance from motorists (5)
- 2 - MJ's album drops an 'aitch'? (7)
- 3 - Found in trading places (7)
- 7 - Learner plays tennis endlessly with this bird (8)

Solutions to Crossword #15 (Pitta, March 2013)

ACROSS: 2 – BLUETHROAT, 5 – FULVETTA, 6 – NIGHTINGALE, 8 – RUBYTHROAT

DOWN: 1 – BULLFINCH, 3 – RIVER TERN, 4 – SCOTER, 7 – NIGHTJAR

For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 5 May 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 19th May 2013, 6.00AM: Kasu Brahmananda Reddy (KBR) National Park, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad.

Spread over 400 acres, this park was originally the Chiran Palace grounds. Easily accessible due to its location in the heart of the city, the KBR Park is a haven for Partridges and Peafowl, and one can expect to see some scrubland birds as well. The lake in the park, and its surrounds, can also throw up some interesting water birds. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: WHEN CHANOS CHANOS BECAME TSUNAMI MACCHI - The post-December 2004 ecological scenario in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Expert talk by Pankaj Sekhsaria)

Thursday, 16th May 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

What actually happened in the A&N islands in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami of December 2004? This presentation will explore some of the little understood or discussed geological, geographical and ecological changes that took place in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami of December 26, 2004.

Pankaj Sekhsaria is a member of the environmental action and research group, Kalpavriksh and has been working in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for over 15 years now. He has written extensively on issues of the islands in India's mainstream English press and is author of two books - 'Troubled Islands - Writings on the environment and indigenous peoples of the A&N Islands' (2003) and 'The Jarawa Tribal Reserve Dossier - Cultural and Biological Diversities in the Andaman Islands' (UNESCO & Kalpavriksh, 2010). Later this year, December 2013 will see the release of his first novel that is also based in the Andaman Islands. It is being published by Harper Collins India.

Trip Report – Nehru Zoological Park – 14th April 2013

Adnan Uddin



Photo: Hemant Kumar

I was pretty excited for my first field trip with BSAP. Earlier this year, I had participated in the “Bird Race 2013” which was organized by HSBC along with BSAP and GHAC. This birding trip was planned to Nehru

Zoological Park, Hyderabad which is a major tourist attraction in the city and also one of the most visited destinations in Hyderabad.

The thought of bird watching at the zoo in the wee hours of the morning thrilled me. As a kid, I was always fascinated by the flora, fauna and the amazing landscapes in the zoo. Spread over an area of 380 hectares, the zoo looks like an oasis in the middle of a concrete desert. The lush green gardens, lawns and groves in the zoo provide a natural setting to the birds. Needless to say, the field trip was meant to watch and observe the non-captive birds in the zoo.

We assembled at the gate at 6.30AM. Around twenty people were present when the birding started. The number grew to forty as time progressed. Morning dawn had just arisen then. We could hear number of birds singing merry signalling the start of the day. A group of Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*) were the first of the bird species which greeted us. Asif Husain helped me in identifying their name.



Oriental Magpie Robin (Photo: Adnan Uddin)

A group of Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) were hovering around us. After few minutes of birding, people from our group were scattered in various directions. As I was walking near the enclosures, I saw an Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) singing on top of a tree. I immediately called the fellow birders who relished the song and beauty of this bird.

As we walked further, I remembered the famous quote by Picasso, "Everyone wants to understand painting. Why is there no attempt to understand the song of the birds?" Well, a research actually says that human language has evolved from birdsong.

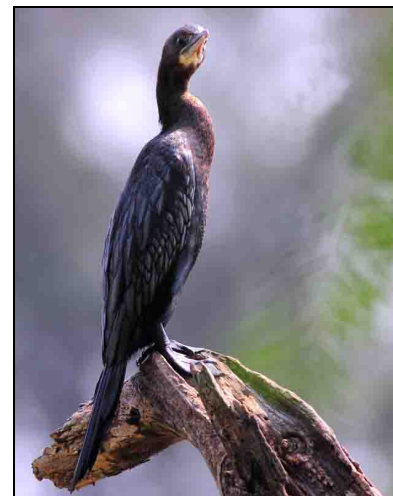
We continued birding. We could see many common birds. The House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) and the Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) were having their breakfast from the litter scattered by people who visit the zoo. We

started walking towards the lakes. We could see many aquatic birds. One can find Egrets, Herons and Ducks in the lake.



Purple Swamphen (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

I was quite happy to spot three Purple Swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) at the lake. They were at a close distance and I could take their pictures with ease. Greater human presence in the zoo might have removed their shyness a bit, otherwise they usually disappear whenever I try to go near them in the reedy marshes.



Little Cormorant (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

One can always find a bevy of Cormorants, Egrets and Herons in the lake. The view at the lake is very picturesque. There was a Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*) perched aloof in the dense trees afar. Firstly, I took it to be a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and shared the name with Sagarika and Vinay but later when I returned home and saw the pictures, I realized my folly.

We also sighted the Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) and the long-legged Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) in the lake. One of the birders was rewarded with the sight of an Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*). The sudden appearance of the Blue-faced Malkoha (*Rhopodytes viridirostris*) and the Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) excited all of us. Also known as Brainfever bird, the Common Hawk Cuckoo was sighted at multiple locations.

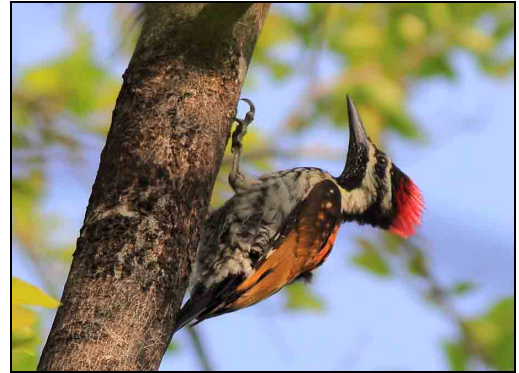


Common Hawk Cuckoo juvenile
(Photo: Hemant Kumar)

A few people reported that they had seen the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) and Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*).



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (Photo: Hemant Kumar)



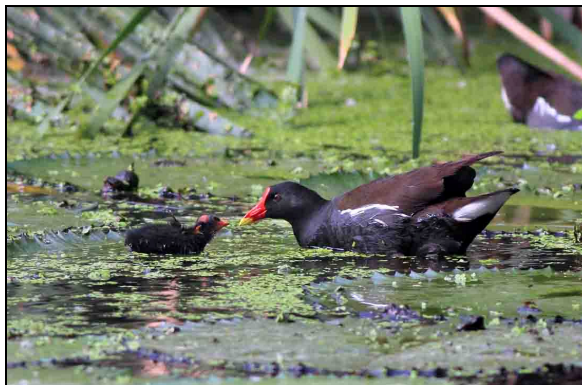
Black-rumped Flameback (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

Two hours of birding and we were very tired. A break was very much essential. Aasheesh sir asked us to assemble at the Guest House so that we can have our breakfast and tea. On my way to the Guest House, Sagarika and Vinay told me that they spotted a pair of Spotted Owlets (*Athene brama*) on top of a tree. When they showed me, there were actually three of them. It was a cute sight to remember seeing the owlets bobbing their heads and staring at us.



Spotted Owlet (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

We assembled at the guest house and were having our breakfast. It was so kind of the Zoo curator A Shankaran sir to arrange tea for all of us at the guest house premises. I was sipping tea quietly admiring the wetlands there. Suddenly I saw a pair of Common Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*) come out of the marshes feeding their chick. They were dipping their bills under the water and feeding on some invertebrates and subsequently feeding their chick. It was a sight to behold. The toes of Common Moorhens do not have any webbing although they are very good swimmers.



Common Moorhen (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

While everyone were busy enjoying watching the family of Common Moorhens, a Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) announced its arrival. As the name indicates, it is a typical arboreal species, feeding mostly in trees on fruits, seeds and invertebrates. It is very agile, scrambling from one branch to the other.



Rufous Treepie (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

We were perked up not just because of the snacks but also due to the presence of Rufous Treepie and Common Moorhen near the Guest House. It was 9.00AM and the hot summer sun was already showing its fury on us. We thought of birding for an hour more and then leave. Since people started scattering again, I thought it was the right time for a group photo. Hemant happily obliged to click the photo for us.

As we walked further, we saw White-browed Wagtails (*Motacilla madaraspatensis*), Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) and a Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) in the grasslands where the Spotted Deer were present. As we were walking towards the exit, we found some wet

grassland where many waders had assembled. The fresh water and lush greenery along with the birds gave an artistic impression of paradise. Surekha, Sagarika, Vinay, Hemant and Madhavi were there alongside me in this place.



Black-crowned Night Heron (Photo: Adnan Uddin)

There were a couple of Black-crowned Night Herons perched on a tree in their usual hunched position. They are very social and associate themselves with other heron species. The Night Herons feed throughout the night to avoid day competition with herons using the same habitat. They are most active at dusk and at night.

We did not want to leave but the zoo started filling with daily visitors and sweltering hot weather forced us to leave. We assembled near the exit. It was very heartening to see kids accompanying their parents in this field trip. One of the kids was wearing a solar fan cap to beat the heat. Kids are inherently interested in the nature around them. Activities like these help children develop personal relationships with nature. It is a very good way to learn about the gifts of the Creator. They were joyous all through the trip. Shafaat Ulla sir was surprised that I was not yet a member of BSAP. I wanted to enrol myself but I did not carry hard cash. In a funny way I asked him if he accepts swipe cards, to which he retorted that it's high time he installed a Swipe Card Reader on his trouser belt on birding trips. We broke into peals of laughter and finally bid goodbye to each other. Overall the trip was very satisfying. We enjoyed every bit of it.

Following is the list of bird species spotted during the trip:

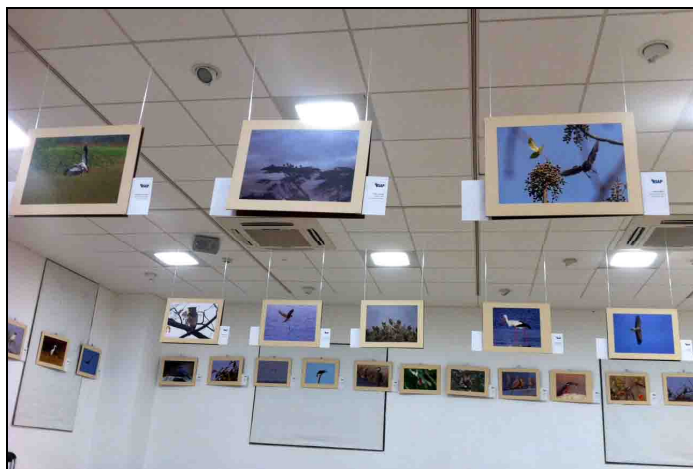
S. No	Species	Scientific Name
1	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
2	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
3	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
4	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
5	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
6	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
7	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
9	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
10	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
11	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
12	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
13	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
14	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
15	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
16	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
17	Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
18	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
19	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
20	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
21	Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
22	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
23	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
24	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
25	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
26	Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Rhopodytes viridirostris</i>
27	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
28	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
29	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
30	Purple Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
31	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
32	Scaly-breasted Munia (Spotted Munia)	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
33	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>
34	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
35	Black-rumped Flameback (Lesser Goldenback)	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
36	White-browed Wagtail (Large Pied Wagtail)	<i>Motacilla madaraspatensis</i>
37	Asian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
38	White-throated Kingfisher (White-breasted Kingfisher)	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
39	Black-headed Ibis (Oriental White Ibis)	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>

40	Red-naped Ibis (Black Ibis)	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
41	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
42	Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>
43	Jacobin Cuckoo (Pied Crested Cuckoo)	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
44	Common Hawk Cuckoo (Brainfever Bird)	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
45	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
46	Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>
47	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
48	Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
49	Black Bittern	<i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>
50	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
51	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
52	Tawnt-Bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
53	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
54	Black-eared Kite	<i>Milvus (migrans) lineatus</i>
55	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
56	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
57	Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus (oriolus) kundoo</i>
58	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
59	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
60	Cinnamon Bittern (Chestnut Bittern)	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>
61	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>
62	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
63	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
64	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
65	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>
66	Streaked Weaver	<i>Ploceus manyar</i>
67	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus</i>

(with inputs from Humayun Taher, Surekha Aitabathula and Hemant Kumar)

Report – BSAP BIRD PHOTO EXHIBITION – 22nd April to 3rd May 2013

Humayun Taher



Some of the photographs on display (Photo: Mahamkali Suresh)

Of late, birdwatchers have come to recognize that yet another tool has been added to the paraphernalia associated with their hobby. With the advent of the digital age, the camera has become an important, indeed integral part, of birding in general. As such, it is not to be wondered that several members of the BSAP have turned to this interesting gadget and have got very good with it too.

To recognize the importance of the camera as a tool to enjoyable and meaningful birding, the BSAP decided to organize a photographic exhibition comprising photographs taken by members. The dates of the exhibition were from 22nd April (opening day was selected to coincide with Earth Day) through to 3rd May 2013. As usual, the Goethe-Zentrum was most kind in allowing us the use of their auditorium in which to display the exhibits.

International Earth Day is celebrated annually on 22nd April. In 1968, the U.S. Public Health Service organized the Human Ecology Symposium, an environmental conference for students to hear from scientists about the effects of environmental degradation on human health. This was the beginning of Earth Day. For the next two years, activists and students worked to plan the first Earth Day. In April 1970 - along with a federal proclamation from U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson - the first Earth Day was held. Earth Day Network activists and members focus on environmental education; local, national, and global policies; public environmental campaigns; and organization of national and local earth day events to promote activism and environmental protection.



Aasheesh Pittie (L) and Shafaat Ulla (R) lighting the lamp (Photos: Dr Samuel Sukumar)



On 22nd April, to coincide with the occasion and spirit of the International Earth Day, the BSAP Bird Photo Exhibition also was inaugurated in the presence of BSAP executive committee members, Goethe-Zentrum members, photographers and their families. The inaugural lamp was lit

by Aasheesh Pittie, BSAP President; Shafaat Ulla, BSAP Hon. Secretary; Amita Desai, Goethe-Zentrum Executive Director; Anna Edlin, Goethe-Zentrum Program Co-ordinator, and Mahamkali Suresh of the BSAP.



Anna Edlin addressing the gathering
(Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Speaking on the occasion first was Anna Edlin of the Goethe-Zentrum. She spoke about the Goethe-Zentrum initiative for Earth Day and the collaboration between them and the BSAP in many mutual activities beneficial to the environment. She expressed great happiness that the BSAP has taken this initiative to promote the importance of photography as a vital conservation tool which has been largely undervalued in the present times. At the same time she also expressed delight at the large and very interesting photographs that were on display, and also spoke of the possibility of making this an annual event.

Aasheesh Pittie, President of the BSAP drew a picture of his younger days when photography was a considerably more difficult hobby. Photographs had to be printed before they could be pronounced good or not; cameras and the necessary equipment were expensive and cumbersome to carry in the field; film was not always readily available and lastly, there was the uncertainty of whether the photograph taken was good or not so good. Most of these arguments have been completely negated by the digital revolution that has placed excellent equipment within the reach of most people and is moreover neither cumbersome nor difficult to carry in the field. Small wonder then that there are so many cameras accompanying birders on their outings in the field.

Aasheesh also highlighted how photography can be an important tool in the conservation battles that are being fought these days. At the end, he explained some of the criteria used by the selection committee to select the photographs for display. He concluded by agreeing with Edlin on making this an annual event; a possibility that was made the more probable by Amita Desai's statement at this point that the Goethe-Zentrum would be delighted to help in hosting the event annually. This statement was greeted with great enthusiasm and the BSAP committee has agreed to make this an annual event as far as is possible.

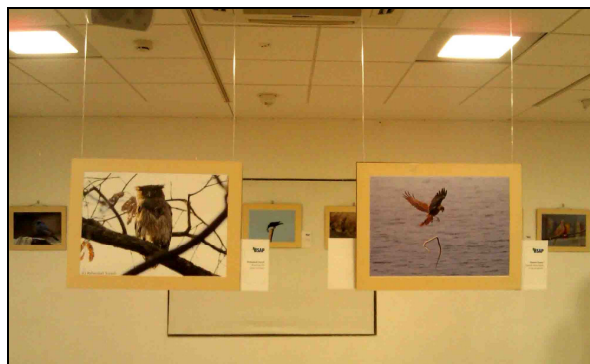


Photo: Nishant Shah

Shafaat Ulla, the Hon. Secretary of the BSAP then gave a few statistics: 21 photographers (two of them being ladies) had sent in over a hundred photographs. Of these, the selection committee had narrowed down to 66 photographs that depicted 63 species, a fair cross-section, not necessarily restricted to Indian Birds, as there were some entries depicting the African Bateleur Eagle, the Ostrich and the Marabou Stork. On the whole it was an interesting selection showing the diversity of bird-life in the country in general and AP in particular. I personally was much impressed with the photograph of the Ostrich in their natural habitat, something that is very difficult to imagine, given the comparison between the very small wildlife reserves in this part of the world against some of the massive tracts in other parts.

Shafaat Ulla also introduced the audience to the photographers who were present. The photographers whose works were presented here are Premjit, Asif, Prasad, Hemant, Iqbal, Jairam, Suresh, Nishant, Nupur, Ravi, Humayun, Vijay, Anjali, Vikram, Umesh, Prakash, Samuel, Anand, Deepu, Kulkarni and Shiva Kumar.



Premjit presenting a memento to Amita Desai
(Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Among other things, a photograph taken by Premjit (depicting three exceedingly droll Spotted Owlets) was presented to the Goethe-Zentrum as a memento; the photograph was handed over by the photographer to Amita Desai. Shafaat Ulla also assured that the BSAP would do its best to see that the initiative taken by this exhibition was maintained and that the conversion to an annual event would be seriously considered in the near future.

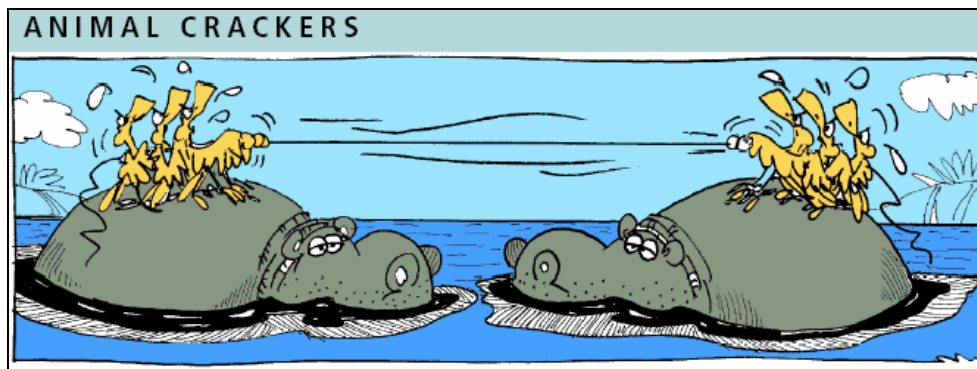
The meeting was well attended by members of the BSAP, the photographers and their families. Some of the members attended even from as far away as Vizag and Tirupati (Vikram and Suresh). I wish everyone would emulate their fine example. The Goethe-Zentrum provided us with snacks and refreshments that were most welcome.

I would like to close by pointing out that while photography is, no doubt, a wonderful asset to the serious birdwatcher, and a very exciting and satisfying hobby, it behooves us to make use of it responsibly, and ensure that we ourselves do not cause stress or pose a risk to the subject of the whole exercise – our beloved birds.



Some members of the audience (Photos: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 14-08-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)




Grey Heron (Lotus Pond, 03-04-2010)

Order: Pelecaniformes
Family: Ardeidae
Genus: *Ardea*
Species: *A. cinerea*
Size: 90-100 cm

Description & distribution: The Grey Heron is a large bird, standing around 100 cm tall, and its wingspan is one-and-a-half to two times that at 155-195 cm. The Grey Heron is largely grey above and off-white below. In adults, the head has a white forehead, centre of crown and sides, and a slender crest, while in immature birds, the head is dull grey in colour. The powerful bill is pinkish-yellow, and this colour is brighter in breeding adults. The flight is slow and, as is characteristic of most herons and bitterns, the long neck is retracted (pulled back into an S-shape) while in flight. This trait also helps differentiate it in flight from storks, cranes and spoonbills, which usually extend their necks while flying.

The Grey Heron is seen from sea-level up to around 500 m and, at times, even up to 1000 m. On occasion, it has been known to breed at higher altitudes too (Ladakh, 3500-4000 m). The Grey Heron is usually seen in or near water bodies of all kinds – fresh, brackish or saline – and prefers areas with trees as it is an arboreal rooster and nester.

Behaviour: The Grey Heron is usually seen walking or wading in the shallow waters along the edges of water bodies, though it can also stand quite still for a long time, waiting for its prey to approach and then striking rapidly. It is also seen quite often on up-thrust rocks or islands in the middle. It is generally a solitary feeder though, when a good food source is found, it may congregate in small numbers. It puts its strong, dagger-like bill to good use, feeding on fish, eels, amphibians, crabs, molluscs and aquatic insects. At times, it may also take small mammals or reptiles and, even, small birds up to the size of a rail. Besides its preferred habitat, it has shown its ability to adapt to urban environments, establishing sizable colonies in places like Amsterdam (Netherlands), Ireland, etc.

The call of the Grey heron is a loud croaking ‘fraaank’. One sample can be heard here. 

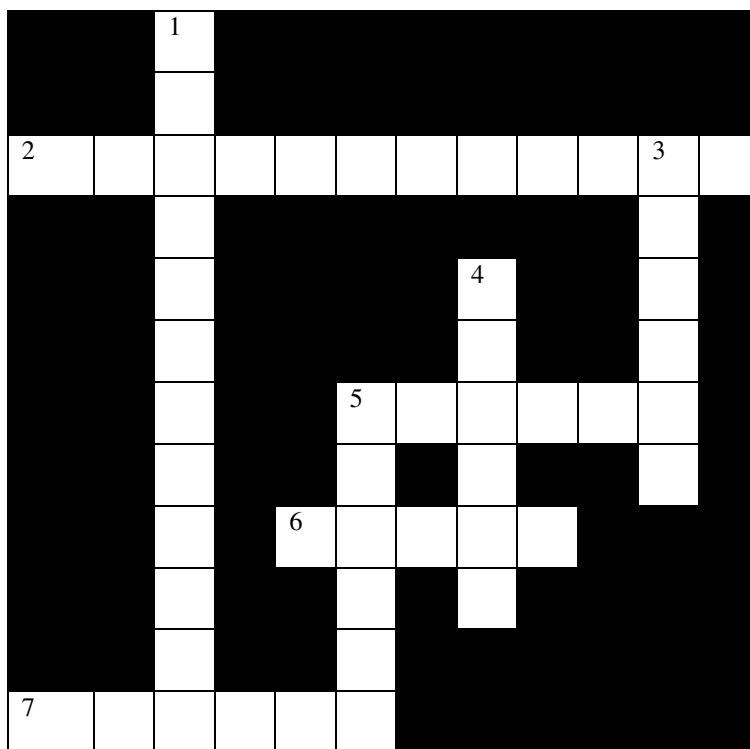
Nesting: In the tropical region, the Grey Heron generally breeds during the monsoons but it has been known to breed at other times during the year too. It roosts and breeds in large mixed colonies, even up to hundreds of pairs of birds, in tall trees close to lakes, seashores or other wetlands like rivers, marshes or estuaries; there must, however, be sufficient shallow water in which to feed. At times, it may also nest in reedbeds. The nest is a large, messy platform of bulky sticks, usually high up in trees, but may also be built of reeds if the nest is in reedbeds. The Grey Heron also sometimes nests on the ground, in which case the nest is just a scrape in the ground, ringed with small stones and debris. The usual clutch is three to six greyish-white or bluish-grey eggs, and both parents share incubation duties.

Local name: It is known as ‘nari’, ‘sain’ or ‘kabud’ in Hindi, ‘narayana pakshi’ in Telugu and ‘sambal naarai’ in Tamil.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #17

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 2 - Two hearts hit for these birds? (8)
5 - Premier California university takes in firm review of this bird (6)
6 - Himalayan / Mountain bird digests almost a full dry fruit (5)
7 - The endless rush for this bird (6)

DOWN

- 1 - Eight-legged poacher looks somewhat like a sunbird (12)
3 - This dove is a reptile? (6)
4 - Arch UK arrangement for this partridge (6)
5 - Hydrogen-induced cough in this member of the crow family? (6)

Solutions to Crossword #16 (Pitta, April 2013)

ACROSS: 4 – TRAGOPAN, 5 – OWL, 6 – TIT, 8 – PELICAN

DOWN: 1 – HOOTS, 2 – TRILLER, 3 – MARTIN, 7 – LINNET

For Private Circulation Only

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Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 6 June 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 16th June 2013, 6.00AM: Sanjeevaiah Park, Hyderabad.

Spread out over 90 acres, this park, abutting the Hussain Sagar Lake in the heart of the city, is a great spot for birding. While the migrants would be long gone, the resident species can make for a fruitful summer morning. The shady trees offer refuge to quite a few birds, and some of them may also be nesting - Orioles, Sunbirds, Drongos, Asian Pied Starlings, etc. Leafbirds have been seen occasionally, as also Coppersmith Barbets. The lakeshore should offer some waders and it may be possible to glimpse some Terns and Gulls. Permission has been obtained for free entry and also to carry cameras inside the park. It is advisable to carry the BSAP ID cards. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: Annual General Body meeting of the BSAP.

Thursday, 20th May 2013, 5.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Agenda

1. Welcome address by Mr Aasheesh Pittie, President.
2. Annual Report by Mr Shafaat Ulla, Hon. Secretary.
3. Presentation of accounts by Mr K Nanda Kumar, Hon. Treasurer.
4. To receive and adopt the annual report and the audited accounts for the years' ending 31-3-2012 and 31-3-2013.
5. To elect the office bearers for the years 2013 to 2015.
6. To appoint an auditor for the year 2013–2014.
7. Any other subject, notice of which has been given 3 days before the AGM to Hon. Secretary, and permitted by the President.

The meeting will be preceded by Fellowship and refreshments between 5:30–6:00PM.

Trip Report – Kasu Brahmananda Reddy (KBR) National Park – 19th May 2013

Shafaat Ulla



Indian Peafowl (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

The month of May is usually quite hot and we, therefore, organise our summer field trips within the city, and KBR Park is an ideal place for birding during the hot season. This year too

was no exception. For this month's trip, special permission was granted by the A.P. Forest Department to our society for free entry and also to carry binoculars and cameras.

We all gathered at the main entrance gate promptly at 6:00AM. The response was very encouraging with about 35 members, including a few newcomers, attending. After a little wait, we were ushered in and with a forest official as our guide, started birding in real earnest.

The designated walking path was full of morning walkers who were staring at our group with binoculars, cameras, floppy hats, et al. We nevertheless went about with our birding and could spot the usual birds like the Sunbirds, Doves, Mynas and Peafowls, and a White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) which attracted our attention with its persistent loud calls. As we continued further up the walkway, we got a good glimpse of a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) which was busy chasing its insect prey.



Shikra with chick (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

We now entered the conservation zone and our large group gradually got fragmented into smaller groups. Our group continued birding and could see the nest of a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) with a full grown chick inside!

After observing quite a few common species *en route*, we finally reached the lake which still had some water, and could get a bird's eye view of it from the bund, with its Gulmohar (*Delonix regia*) trees in full bloom. Here we were joined by Mr. Kaushik, Addl. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, who not only gave us permission to enter the park but also made it a point to do some birding with us. We all had a brief but good interaction with him while he was there.



Pheasant-tailed Jacana (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

From the bund we could spot four Lesser Whistling-ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*) and a pair of Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*). At the far end of the lake, we observed two White-breasted Waterhens (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), a Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) and a lone White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) sitting serenely atop a concrete pillar and, as somebody remarked, waiting for its breakfast.

This triggered our own hunger pangs and we all hunkered down on the ground and opened up our respective picnic boxes for a well-deserved breakfast. The other groups also joined us one by one. One of them reported seeing an Asian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) which brought out a 'wow' from all of us; another group saw the harbinger of rain, the Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) and we all hoped that monsoons this year would be in time. Someone else saw the Stone Curlew or, to use its present crazy name, the Eurasian Thick-knee (*Burhinus oedichenus*) which, we are given to understand, are residents in the park.



Yellow-billed Babbler (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)



Indian Grey Hornbill (Photo: Adnan Uddin)

It was now time to get up and start our journey back as it was 9:00AM and the sun was getting quite hot for comfort. The walk back was quite rewarding as we could spot a Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) peering at us suspiciously from its well-hidden perch, and also an Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) gliding majestically overhead. Some of us also managed to locate the nest of a Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) with three chicks inside! We however gave it a wide berth so as not to disturb the happy family.



Red-vented Bulbul with chicks (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

We finally reached the gate after chalking up a list of about 50 species of birds - not bad at all, considering that we had only about 3-4 hours of birding, that too in peak summer. After handshakes all around, we dispersed with promises to meet during the next field trip.

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Kaushik, Mr. Mohan, DFO and the KBR Park officials for their help in making our field trip very pleasant and fruitful.

Before signing off, I would like to mention that three new members joined our society – Dr. Geethanjali (Life), Mr. Satvik and Mr. Binu. We heartily welcome them to our group and hope to see them more often in future.



Black-shouldered Kite (Photo: Asif Husain)

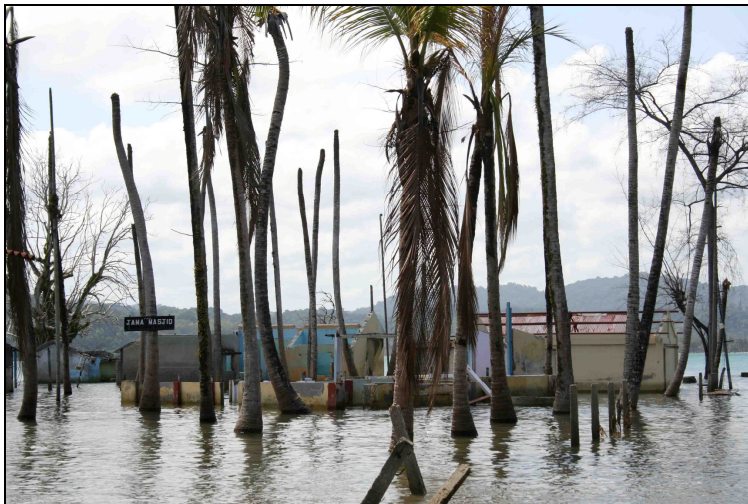
Following is the list of bird species spotted during the trip:

S. No	Species	Scientific Name
1	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
2	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
3	Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
4	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
5	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
6	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
7	Eurasian Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>
8	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>

9	Blue Rock Pigeon	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
10	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
11	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
12	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
13	White-throated / White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
14	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
15	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>
16	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
17	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>
18	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
19	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striata</i>
20	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
21	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
22	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
23	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
24	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
25	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
26	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
27	Black-winged / Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
28	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
29	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
30	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
31	Tickell's / Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
32	Asian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
33	Lesser Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
34	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>
35	Yellow-eyed Babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>
36	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>
37	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
38	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
39	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
40	Jacobin Cuckoo/ Pied Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
41	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>

WHEN CHANOS CHANOS BECAME TSUNAMI MACCHI - The post-December 2004 ecological scenario in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Text: Sharada Annamaraju; Photos: Pankaj Sekhsaria



Submerged township of Campbell Bay

In his speech titled ‘The Perils of Indifference’, author and holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel elaborates on the state of indifference as an unnatural, deeply seductive one. The lines between light and darkness, good and evil, cruelty and compassion, crime and punishment blur. To be involved in another person’s pain or despair is awkward and troublesome. To look away is easier, rather than have our hopes and dreams rudely interrupted.

We are aware of the chaos such indifference has caused across mainland India in north eastern states, in Maoist belts in central India where numerous indigenous tribes dwell, and Jammu & Kashmir. Twelve hundred kilometers away from mainland, the Andaman & Nicobar group of islands have been receiving a similar step-daughterly treatment over decades, perhaps compounded since the December 2004 Tsunami.

The tragic incident chimes in our minds every time in conjunction with the name of the islands. It is an event that is not only embedded in our minds, but also on the face of the Earth. For even before the waves arrived to sweep lives away, was the earthquake with Banda Aceh at its epicenter, of such magnitude that it tilted Earth further on its axis. With Port Blair as a pivot, the northern tip of the Andaman Islands rose 4—5 ft, and roughly 15 ft at the southern end of the Nicobars submerged permanently.

In a talk titled “*When Chanos chanos became Tsunami macchi*,” Pankaj Sekhsaria, a researcher from Pune-based Kalpavriksh and the author of ‘Troubled Islands’ offered an ecological, anthropological, geopolitical and geological overview of the union territory post the calamity. The title harks back to the time when, for months afterwards, Milk Fish *Chanos chanos* was the only species being caught by fishermen in the Nicobars. It was so ubiquitous, and the fishermen were so flustered with their catch, they christened it the ‘Tsunami *macchi*’.

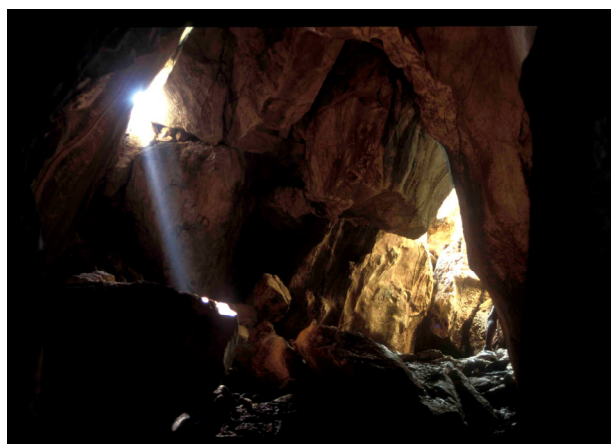


A woman holding *Chanos chanos*



Nicobar Megapode

The A&N Islands are the submerged tops of a mountain range which once perhaps connected Indonesia to Burma. There's barely any flat land, the terrain a roller coaster and mostly rocky in nature. Geologically, they sit on the seismic Burmese microplate. Great Nicobar is a mere 200 km from Banda Aceh. On a clear day from Indira Point, Indonesia is visible. Deeply enigmatic, scientific studies on the islands have only just begun. Roughly 500 islands spread over 8249 sq km, the islands are blessed with tropical forests of 7170 sq km, mangroves, beach cliffs, shingle and pebble beaches. Surrounding these, are over 2000 sq km of rich coral reefs harbouring over 200 species, but poorly studied. As is characteristic of island biogeography, A&N display high species endemism such as the Nicobar Megapode, Andaman Serpent Eagle, Nicobar Parakeet, the Andaman Pit Viper, the Narcondam Hornbill and many more. The closest relative of the Andaman Gecko for instance occurs as far away as Madagascar. The islands are also the eastern most limit of the range of the Edible Nest Swiftlet.



**Chalees Ek Cave on N. Andaman Island
(where Edible Nest Swiftlets build nests)**

The indigenous communities on the Islands however, are in a bad state and on the verge of extinction as government apathy and migrants from mainland with insular cultural approaches came to the isles. The Jarawas for instance lived undisturbed for

30-40,000 years, and today number at 350 individuals approximately and are most definitely being pushed to extinction. When the Government of India put together a document in the 1960s, they referred to the forests of the Andamans as “infested with Jarawas,” reflecting the long standing colonial approach the Centre has had towards indigenous peoples’ rights. The Jarawas never numbered much to begin with, but as sedentary populations from the mainland migrated, local communities contracted communicable diseases. The Jarawas today speak Hindi, but cannot really express themselves clearly as the innate nuances of a language are lost in translation. Their wants and needs go unaddressed.

The Great Andamanese once numbered at 5000 and today are at 50. The Onge are a casualty of the GoI’s welfare plans involving tobacco and liquor besides rice, redolent of colonial attitudes to native communities around the world. Along with plummeting populations, disappears a massive body of knowledge, languages and ways of living. Sekhsaria cited an instance of conducting a workshop in Katchal Island with the Nicobari Community on fish species found in coral reefs with an Australian publication. The participants looked at the pictures in the book and could identify all the fish and pointed out where all they could find them. They could tell you if a fishing line would sink or float while throwing it out.

As part of the “colonisation” of the islands by the government, Sekhsaria cited another startling historical incident. As an astonishing image of an elderly Sikh Sardar and his wife making their way against the backdrop of towering tropical trees came on screen, we learnt how the story of the A&N Islands can never be complete without the story of the Sikh Sardars of Nicobar.

In the 1970s, to send out a geopolitical message on the ownership of islands, besides encouraging mainland Indians to migrate, the government resettled several hundreds of Sardars to Great Nicobar. Over the decades, they built their lives in a landscape resembling nothing of Punjab’s fertile plains. When the waves came, they were among the worst affected. “To understand what people can do in adversity, their story needs to be told,” said Sekhsaria.



Destroyed House of a Sikh Sardar couple in G. Nicobar

In this complex scenario, came the Earthquake rapidly altering geography. The Nicobars bore the brunt of the calamity being so close to the epicenter and as land submerged instantaneously during the earthquake, the Tsunami compounded the damage. The Andamans occupy 77% of land area and sustained 2% of over 3500 dead and missing people. In the Nicobars spread over 22% land area, 98% deaths accounting for 12% of the population took place.



Coral reefs on W. Coast of Interview Island permanently exposed

Along the west coast of Interview Island in the northern parts, several sq km of coral reefs were thrust up and permanently above the high tide line. New beaches formed. Old mangroves died. The ecological changes were swift as we saw with *Chanos chanos*. Sippighat, outside Port Blair, was inundated with saline water and yielded tons of prawns after the Tsunami.



Submerged coast of G. Nicobar

As landscapes were washed away, we have no way of knowing how many species were affected besides human lives. Studies have been few, permits difficult to come by to account for status of population of countless species in Nicobars for instance. Prime Leatherback turtle nursery grounds were swept away in

the Tsunami, already under threat from erosion, tourism and development. The ornithologist Ravi Sankaran, before he passed away, estimated that 70% of the Nicobar Megapode species was lost during the calamity. They are reportedly rebounding however.

In the past five years, at least 500 earthquakes have occurred. Some even charted a 7 on the Richter scale. The region has most definitely become highly seismically active as compared to earlier. In this backdrop, the government's attitude has apparently remained unchanged. The Islands continue to invest their entire commerce structure around tourism. In the aftermath of the Tsunami, there was a sharp drop in tourism which only slowly climbed back up.

In terms of reconstruction and aid policies, multi-pronged strategies benefitting broad groups of people are required, placing the rights of indigenous tribes in the forefront. To demonstrate how the challenging situation is a political system for survival versus the rights of tribals, Sekhsaria explained how activists want the Andaman Grand Trunk Road shut down in aid of the tribes, but are faced with opposition from locals for whom the road is their lifeline.

The range of evaluation, studies and attention required is mind boggling. Ecological inputs have been barely any so far. In the Nicobars, aspirational lifestyles clash with practicality as concrete constructions have sprung up since the Tsunami. Before the disaster, most huts were made of thatch and bamboo. Stone quarrying in the islands has seen a boom. The reconstruction period also saw a massive influx of labour workers from mainland India. Instances of patriarchal attitudes imported from mainland cultures and assaults on local Nicobari women have emerged.

With the Islands falling near the Malacca Straits, a major shipping lane, there have been massive plans of defense expansion by the GoI as China emerges a superpower. In recent news, we have read of a base on the Narcondam Island being proposed, imperiling the lives of the endemic hornbill species. In 2009, the former President proposed a 250 MW nuclear power plant in the seismically active Islands, as well as aircraft carriers and nuclear submarine fleets.

The talk by Sekhsaria was one that we all, once in a while, need to step back and think about. On one hand, the earthquake and subsequent Tsunami was a mere blip in the creation of Earth, a work in progress. A geological event becomes a cataclysmic change when human lives come into focus. As new coastlines and landscapes have emerged in the troubled islands, we need a new roadmap for their future. Climate change remains an abstract, but policies affecting the lives of the indigenous communities, ecological heritage, as well as migrant settlers needs to be implemented with the awareness that the islands are more quake prone than before.

Trip Report – BSAP Camp at Maredumilli – 31st Aug to 2nd Sep 2012

Text: Shafaat Ulla, Surekha Aitabathula, Bindu Madhavi Racherla, Humayun Taher

Photos: Humayun Taher



Malabar Giant Squirrel

This was the second time that a BSAP Camp was being organised to Maredumilli. We had already been there in June 2007, when 23 members participated and all had stayed in the tents at the Jungle Star Camping site in a thickly wooded area about 10 kms. from the village. Sharada apparently could not erase the pleasant memories of the trip and pestered one and all to go there again, as a 'monsoon camp'. A BSAP camp therefore was organised again to Maredumilli after a gap of five years. This time too, the response was overwhelming and 20 members joined the trip. However on this trip the tented accommodation was not available and therefore we had to stay in the cottages at the tourist complex. Later we realized that this may have been a blessing in disguise as the tents are now in a most dilapidated condition and not very suitable for staying in.

We reached Rajahmundry early on the morning of the 31st August, and were joined, at the railway station, by Suresh from Tirupati. Three vehicles, arranged in advance, were waiting for us already at the station and after a hearty breakfast, we started for Maredumilli which is about 70 kms away. Vikram from Vizag joined us at the camp, driving his own car. By the time we settled down in our respective cottages, it was almost lunch time and we decided to have an early lunch before embarking on our main mission – birding. A restaurant attached to the camp and run by local tribals provided us with wholesome and ethnic food.

After lunch we proceeded to the APFDC coffee and pepper plantation with excellent forest cover all around. It is a very fine spot for birding and we had our eyeful of several interesting

species. It is also a haven for butterflies and Dr. Tej Kumar kept identifying the various beauties for us. Here it may be mentioned that next morning we saw some very exotic and rare moths in our camp and Sukumar took some nice photos.

Among the birds, one species perhaps deserves special mention. Humayun followed a Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) which he saw foraging near a small stream. The bird was extremely shy and kept in deep cover. Finally the bird became a little less retiring and appeared in a good position for a photograph to be taken. When working on the photos back in Hyderabad, Humayun realised that the bird was not the Common Kingfisher but actually the Blue-eared Kingfisher (*Alcedo meninting*). This added yet another lifer to the growing list.



Blue-eared Kingfisher

Before we called it a day, we also visited the Medicinal Plant Development area and also a nice and beautiful building adjacent to the plantation area. Both the places are abandoned and in ruins. A few lakhs must have gone down the drain – unfortunately.

We returned in the evening and had nice, hot *chai* in the village centre. Everywhere there was 'bamboo chicken' being prepared on charcoal fires; and green bamboo pieces, about a foot long, were also on sale. Incidentally this gastronomic delight, specific to Maredumilli, is world-renowned – famous enough to merit a special feature story in the National Geographic Magazine. Chicken cooked in the hollow of the bamboo shoot making it bamboo-flavoured! Prakash bought half a dozen of these bamboo pieces, with a promise to treat us to the same chicken preparation back home. We are all still waiting for the invitation! Having finished our *chai* we returned to the resort and retired for the day, but not before a hearty meal - the bamboo chicken, of course, being the main item on the menu - to begin afresh early next morning.

Day-2

Day 2 at Maredumilli opened with the gang heading out to an abandoned Rubber Nursery in the morning. It was hilarious to watch some of our gang members relishing a delicious hangover of last night's Bamboo Chicken!

After a good birding session at the Rubber Nursery in the morning, we went to the Jungle Star Camp site. Some BSAP members who had camped at this site a few years ago lamented at the 'Lost Paradise'. The camp, which has tents with moats around it to keep off snakes, now looked totally abandoned and uninhabitable. Standing amidst the derelict and neglected campsite were two swings in top swinging condition! The walk up to the campsite was interesting. It was a climbing pathway, carved along the edge of the forest. The path had a protective railing running throughout because it was a clear drop to the sensuously meandering 'Pamuleru' rivulet in full flow below us.

Post lunch we visited a lovely waterfall site called Jalatharangini. The gurgling clear water tumbled down between big, small and flat rocks, twisting and turning on its way. Amazing how incessantly flowing water can flatten/soften stone! When the strong currents of the River Colorado could carve out the Grand Canyon, this was nothing I thought!

There was silence all around except for the water's orchestra, listening to which makes us want to apply brakes on our hectic and cacophonous urbanised lifestyle. The sights and sounds of the jungle are so tranquilising that they reiterate the pricelessness of silence. I think we must all fall silent more often and listen to the surreal sounds of nature for our own good.

Some lifers for many members on this fruitful trip were the Black-lored Tit (*Parus xanthogenys*). With a colour scheme of black borders to yellow cheeks, a black forehead and lores, uniform green upper parts and black streaking on scapulars, yellowish wing bars and a broad black line down the yellow front, this bird looks spectacular! It uses Woodpecker or Barbet holes for nests and is also known to excavate its own nest hole. The clutch is typically three to five white eggs spotted red.

Next came the Jerdon's Baza (*Aviceda jerdoni*), perched very high (both figuratively and literally!). The raptor redesigned the top edge of the forest canopy with its proud bearing accentuated by a straight-out crest. The crest was easily distinguishable even from afar. Once spotted and focussed on this raptor, none of our binocs came down for quite a while, although it was half hidden from view. The power of the visual appeal of a Jerdon's Baza - awesome!



Jerdon's Baza

The smallness of the Vernal Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus vernalis*) is totally endearing. As it sat in the sun, the glossy finish of this tiny but stocky green parrot with a red bill, rump and upper tail coverts and a yellowish-white iris reflected light back like a precious gem. Some of us were surprised to learn that this is the only species of "Parrot" found in India. The others are all 'Parakeets'.

The Bronzed Drongo (*Dicrurus aeneus*) was another lifer for some. A less deeply forked tail and a flatter bill when compared to the common Black Drongo; this beautiful and stern '*kotwal*' was strongly glossed with metallic blue-green, hence the name.

The Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) gets an 'A-plus plus' when marked for neatness in colour coordination and design. A combination of broad yellowish-white median and greater wing-covert bars and a white patch on the secondaries, a double black breast band with the lower band broken at the centre (which looks like a chunky tribal neck piece), olive upperparts, whitish underparts and a white supercilium complete a pretty picture of this neat bird.



Forest Wagtail

The Brown-Capped Pygmy-Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus nanus*) grey, brown and white - a startling potpourri of colours on this small 13-centimetre fellow is also very beautiful in design. Close to the woodpecker we saw seven Black-hooded Orioles (*Oriolus xanthornus*) flitting amongst the trees, looking as though they were playing hide and seek amongst themselves and also with us. This bird is a lovely yellow-and-black Item Number!



Black-hooded Oriole

Also seen on Day 2 were the Short-Toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*), Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*), Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*), Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*), Blue-Bearded Bee-Eater (*Nictyornis athertoni*), the largest of the Bee-eater species seen in the state; Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus mahrattensis*), Rufous Woodpecker (*Micropternus brachyurus*), Ashy Woodswallow (*Artamus fuscus*), Greater Yellownape (*Picus flavinucha*), Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*), Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*), Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*), Indian Scimitar Babbler (*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*), Brown-Cheeked Fulvetta (*Alcippe poioicephala*), Black-headed Munia (*Lonchura malacca*), Common Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa*) and the Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*).



Large-billed Crow

While roaming the beautiful jungles looking for birds, one very interesting phenomena caught the eye; the Strangler Fig. This plant species gets its name from its 'strangling' growth habit. These plants begin life as epiphytes, when their seeds (often bird-dispersed) germinate in crevices atop tall trees. These seedlings send their roots downward and envelop the host tree while also growing upward to reach the sunlight zone. On strangulation, the host tree can sometimes die and the strangler fig becomes the 'columnar tree' with a hollow central core. Maredumilli forest was full of Strangler Figs. The Strangler Fig's white roots envelop and encircle the host tree in a linear and permanent strangle hold. It entwines the host tree like a great white snake. In order to tighten its grip on the host tree, the strangler sets base at intervals along the trunk with slender offshoot roots that clutch. These roots looked to me exactly like a Jacana's long toes! The Strangler figs looked domineering, fearsome and unrelenting. Somehow, I felt that the defenceless and vulnerable host tree was silently crying for help. My heart went out to the host tree. I wished I could explain to the host tree that whether we like it or not, parasites are also a part of Nature's Grand Design... and so Day 2 ended with further forays amongst the gastronomic delights of the region.

Day-3

As per strict instructions from Shafaat uncle, we all promptly gathered with our luggage at "Bahuda Cottage" (whatever that means), by 8:00AM in the morning. Breakfasting quickly on the ubiquitous Idly, Vada and Puris, we started for the Coffee plantation by 8:30AM. The previous night's downpour had turned the surroundings lush green, and the ground was a morass of rich wet earth, resembling freshly-baked plum cake. We took the path leading into the depths of the coffee plantation. Though we could hear bird calls all around us, nothing was visible to our sight. This is a common occurrence when birding in thick forest areas such as here at Maredumilli. While crossing a bridge running over a small stream we started to see birds. A Black-lored Tit and a Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch (*Sitta castanea*) sat high up in the trees and a Black Eagle was also seen soaring in the sky.



Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch

We continued walking for about the next half-hour on the road which was leading deeper into the forest. At one point, we split into two groups; one group continuing to walk further into the forest while the other group decided to wait. The silence was extremely soothing. It seemed that most of the group was concentrating on the orchestra of bird and insect calls we could hear on all sides. Suddenly, we heard a very loud call of a bird coming from right behind where we sat. Humayun suddenly became very excited and started looking all around. We could not understand his excitement, until he told us that he recognized the call of the bird, from his researches on the internet, as that of the Malabar Trogon. While he continued to look all around for his Trogon, we spotted a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) jumping about over a small shrub in their somewhat restless manner. At this, we all got to our feet, thinking the activity of the birds has begun. Behind the shrub on a large tree branch we saw the Brown-cheeked Fulvetta and a Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*). On the same tree we saw again, the Pygmy Woodpecker, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Greater Yellownape, Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*) and White-naped Woodpecker (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*). It seemed to be a festival of woodpeckers here.

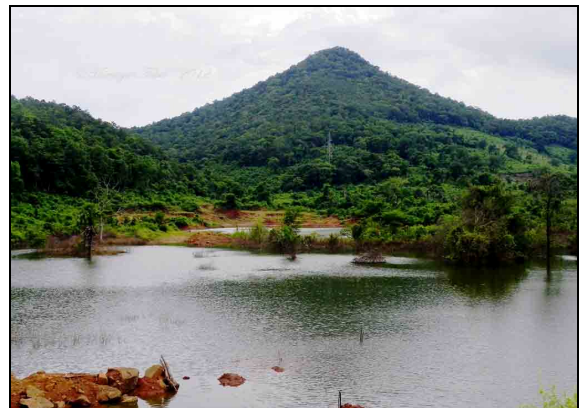
As we were rejoicing in this bonanza, Humayun spotted a pair of Malabar Trogons (*Harpactes fasciatus*) amongst the trees. His frantic attempts to point them out to some of us went unrewarded. Although the male was sitting in plain view, we persisted in looking deeper into the forest whereas the bird was actually right out in the open. We only caught a glimpse as it flew deeper into the trees. However, even this slight sighting was memorable and our happiness knew no bounds as we had added yet another lifer to our list.

Meanwhile the rest of the group rejoined us, having spotted nothing. After taking stock we all together returned to the rubber plantation. At the rubber plantation we saw the by-now usual suspects like the Scarlet Minivet (it was instructive that

on day 1, our first sighting of the Scarlet Minivet was a thrilling experience but the same bird, on day 3, became a "usual suspect" - familiarity perhaps does breed, if not contempt, at least indifference!); Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), Blue-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*), Crested Treeswift (*Hemiprocne coronata*), Red-whiskered (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) and Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Crimson Sunbird (*Aethopyga siparaja*), Black-hooded Oriole, Vernal Hanging Parrot and a Bronzed Drongo.

At noon we all returned for lunch to the Forest resort and, post-lunch, started off on our return, deciding to stop for birding at Rampachodavaram, which is on the way to Rajahmundry. On the way to Rampachodavaram it started to drizzle and, by the time we reached there it had started to rain heavily. We parked our vehicles under a large tree very near to a small temple which afforded us some shelter from the driving heavy rain. After the rain has subsided, a few of us left to look at the Rampa waterfalls while the others preferred to stay back and bird around the temple itself, which had some fields around. The trek to the waterfalls was about 20-30 minutes long along a very slippery path, difficult to climb and surrounded by large trees on all sides. By the time we reached the waterfalls, we all were extremely tired but, just looking at the picturesque view of the waterfalls we forgot our tiredness. Had it not been raining, I think Rampachodavaram would also have been a good birding spot. But considering the limited time available to us we reluctantly had to start back to Rajahmundry to catch the train back to Hyderabad.

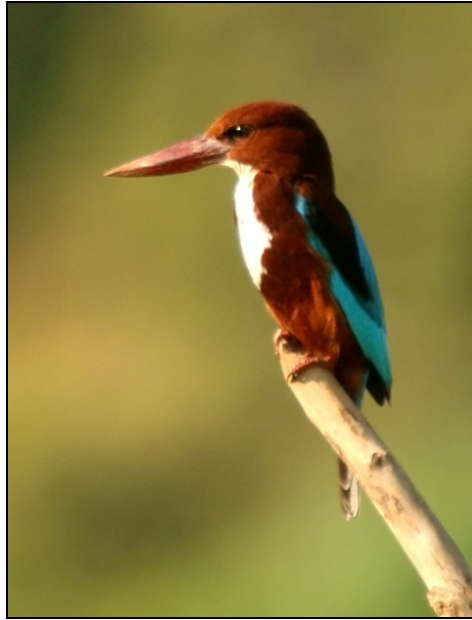
Although this was a rather brief trip, we were able to tally a good number of about 94 species. Considering the thickness of the forest at Maredumilli, this is a very fair total and, when we further consider that several of the species we saw are specialized semi-endemic species, it is a very respectable list indeed. The pristine forests of Maredumilli beckon strongly and we are all waiting eagerly for the next trip to these enchanted hills.



Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)

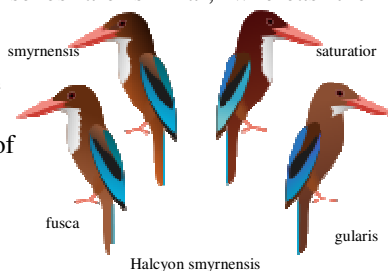


White-throated Kingfisher (Lotus Pond, 03-04-2010)

Order: Coraciiformes
Family: Halcyonidae
Genus: *Halcyon*
Species: *H. smyrnensis*
Size: 27-28 cm

Description & distribution: The White-throated Kingfisher is a large kingfisher, with a bright blue back, blue-and-black wings and blue tail. The head, shoulders, flanks and lower belly are chestnut in colour, breast and throat are white, and the large bill and legs are bright red. Large white patches are visible on the wings while in flight. The sexes are similar, whereas the juvenile is a duller version.

Four geographic races are generally recognized, which vary in size or in the shade of blue on the mantle.



Halcyon smyrnensis

Source: Wikipedia


1. *H. s. smyrnensis*, found in parts of western Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, northwestern parts of India, China, Taiwan and the Philippines, and south to parts of Thailand and Malaysia, Singapore, Sumatra and Java;
2. *H. s. fusca*, found in India, Sri Lanka, South China, Taiwan, Sumatra and West Java;
3. *H. s. saturator*, found in the Andaman Islands; and
4. *H. s. gularis*, found in the Philippines.

Earlier known as 'White-breasted Kingfisher', the common name of 'White-throated Kingfisher' was introduced to include the eastern race, which has white only on the throat and not the breast.

A common species in many different habitats, populations of this kingfisher are widespread and are not threatened. While it usually prefers open country in the plains with trees, wires or other perches, it has been seen at 7500 ft in the Himalayas, and the range is expanding.

Behaviour: The White-throated Kingfisher can usually be found well away from water, perching conspicuously on wires or other exposed perches within its territory. It feeds on a wide range of prey that includes small reptiles and snakes, insects, earthworms, large crustaceans, fish, frogs, crabs and small rodents. It has been reported to prey on small birds like the Oriental White-eye, sparrows, munias, and once, the chick of a Red-wattled Lapwing. It feeds its young mostly on invertebrates. In captivity, it has been noted that it rarely drinks water although it bathes regularly.

The short rounded wings of the White-throated Kingfisher whirl during flight, which is rapid and direct; this coupled with a powerful bill ensure that these kingfishers have few predators when healthy. Rare reports of predation by a Black Kite and a Jungle Crow are probably of sick or injured birds.

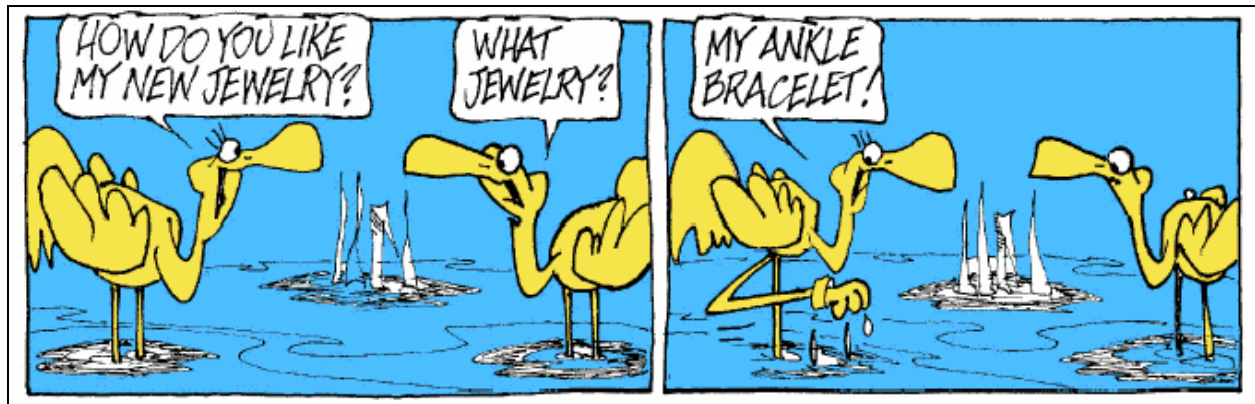
The call of this kingfisher is a chuckling *chake-ake-ake-ake-ake*. One sample can be heard here. 

Nesting: The White-throated Kingfisher begins breeding around the start the monsoons. In the breeding season, males call loudly in the mornings from prominent perches, including wires or the tops of buildings in urban areas. The tail may be flicked occasionally, and in its courtship display, the kingfisher flicks its wings stiffly open for a second or two, exposing the white wing mirrors; it also raises its bill high and displays the white throat and front. The female, in response, makes a rapid and prolonged *kit-kit-kit...* call.

The nest is a tunnel, around 50 cms long, in an earth bank (though they have also been recorded in haystacks). Nest building begins with both birds flying into a suitable mud wall until an indentation is made where they can find a perch hold. Then they perch and continue digging the nest with their bills. The typical clutch consists of 4-7 round white eggs, laid once a year.

Local name: It is known as 'kilkila' or 'kourilla' in Hindi, 'buchegadu' or 'lakmuka' in Telugu and 'wadda machhera' in Punjabi.

Bird Humour

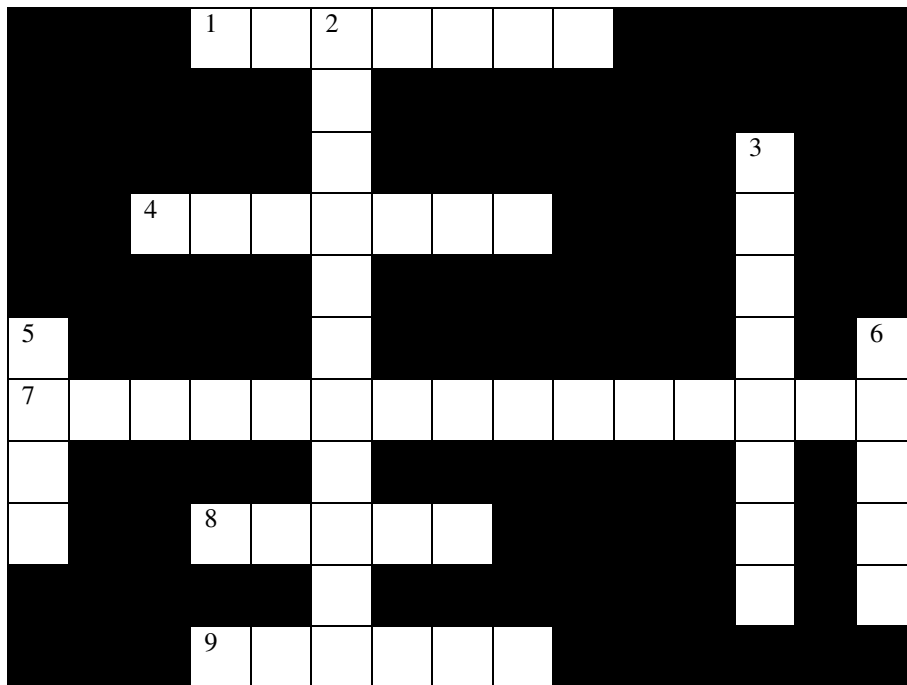


(From Times of India, 17-07-2012)

BIRDING CROSSWORD #18

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 1 - Variety of capelin that eats fish (7)
4 - Glum ape looks for colourful feathers (7)
7 - Soaring causes true harm to this bird (8,7)
8 - He wrote Gulliver very fast (5)
9 - This bird uses its tin arm (6)

DOWN

- 2 - This bird consumes grim Eastern meal with hesitation (11)
3 - Driver takes alien to see this bird (8)
5 - The cat's cries attract this bird (4)
6 - Think seriously about the chicks (5)

Solutions to Crossword #17 (Pitta, May 2013)

ACROSS: 2 – WHITETHROATS, 5 – COUCAL, 6 – MONAL, 7 – THRUSH

DOWN: 1 – SPIDERHUNTER, 3 – TURTLE, 4 – CHUKAR, 5 – CHOUGH

For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 7 July 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 21st July 2013, 6.30AM: Narsapur Reserve Forest.

Spanning an area of over 40 km², the Narsapur Forest is well known for its bird life. The forest is rich in small woodland birds, woodpeckers and flycatchers. Brown Fish Owl, Indian Pitta, White-bellied Drongo etc are some of the interesting sightings during past visits. Narsapur Lake also has the potential of throwing up some surprises. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: EARTHFLIGHT Episode 4: SOUTH AMERICA

Thursday, 22nd July 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

A British nature documentary, Earthflight is a six-part voyage of discovery, spanning six continents and covering some of the world's greatest natural spectacles from a 'bird's-eye view'. Narrated by actor David Tennant, it captures some of the world's most extraordinary natural wonders through the eyes of birds. It is, to put it simply, breathtaking.

The documentary series gives a bird's-eye view of South America, as condors soar along the Andes, scarlet macaws explore the heart of the Amazon and hummingbirds and vultures see the continent's greatest sights. It is a journey that includes Machu Picchu, the Nasca Lines and the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Santiago. In Patagonia, giant petrels shadow killer whales as they hunt seals by stranding their huge bodies on the beach. At Iguassu Falls, dusky swifts dive through the cascades to huddle in communal roosts while hummingbirds bathe below. In a secret Andean location, condors soar in flocks over 40-strong and scavenge on casualties from herds of fighting guanacos. Elsewhere, a mother condor gently pushes her youngster to the edge of a 200-metre cliff, as flight school begins. Deep in the Amazon, macaws seek medicinal clay. They are joined by a host of secretive jungle animals, including spider monkeys and tapirs, all after the same remedy. In Peru, condors soar over fighting sea-lions waiting for casualties and on a mass exodus north, birds converge on the Panama Canal. In Costa Rica, black vultures descend on turtles as they lay their eggs in the sand and pick off the eggs that ping-pong through the air.

Story of Park and Lake
Trip Report – Sanjeevaiah Park – 16th June 2013
Surekha Aitabathula



Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Humayun Taher)

June's birding trip saw 21 of us converge for birding into the friendly neighborhood Sanjeevaiah Park that abuts Hussain Sagar Lake. We got permission for this visit through the good offices of Mr Chandramohan Reddy, IFS, Addl. Commissioner (Urban Biodiversity), Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation.

Our host was Mr D Nagi Reddy, Assistant Director (Horticulture), Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority. Both the gentlemen officers took us around the park while explaining the ongoing dredging operations in Hussain Sagar lake and also pointed out the flora and fauna in the park with a special tour of the Cactus Garden. This was a fruitful trip as our group learnt about a whole lot of things during the course of the trip. More about it later but first about the birds.

We assembled at the gate and began birding around 06.15AM. Immediately upon entering the park, to the left of the gate begins one edge of the lake. Here we saw around 15 Common Coot (*Fulica atra*). I thought their numbers were less than usual. I learnt an interesting fact vis a vis the Common Coot.



Common Coot (Photo: Binu D Nair)

According to the Birdlife Species Factsheet at www.birdlife.org, "Common Coot has an extremely large range, and hence does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the Range Size criterion (Extent of Occurrence <20,000 km² combined with a declining or fluctuating range size, habitat extent/quality, or population size and a small number of locations or severe fragmentation). Despite the fact that the population trend appears to be decreasing, the decline is not believed to be sufficiently rapid to approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the Population Trend criterion (>30% decline over ten years or three generations). The population size is extremely large, and hence does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the Population Size criterion (<10,000 mature individuals with a continuing decline estimated to be >10% in ten years or three generations, or with a specified population structure). For these reasons, the species is evaluated as Least Concern".

The largest congregation of Common Coot I saw (above ten thousand!) was in Khijadiya, Gujarat.

I noticed an interesting bird behaviour and it was our good friend and expert birder Humayun Taher who vocalised it. We noticed that the Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) were not diving like they usually do when feeding. Most of the Grebes present on that day were not really diving. The Little Grebe is known to be an excellent swimmer and diver and is known to pursue its fish

and aquatic invertebrate prey underwater. Humayun and I did see one Little Grebe feeding but not in its usual diving style.



Little Grebe (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Right near the entrance of the park, we saw an Asian Pied Starling (*Sturnus contra*) feeding on a piece of bread very close to us. He did not see us as a threat, he continued pecking and eating the bread crumbs. Did he bring it from somewhere and sit down to eat, or did someone throw bread crumbs there? I wondered. And then there were the stately and elegant Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*). I thought these were also less in number compared to my last visit to the park. An interesting sight was the lone White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) sitting on what looked like the dredging equipment floating in the lake.



Asian Pied Starling (Photo: Binu D Nair)

A White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and a Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) were seen at exactly the same spot that we usually spot them! In a small water body with long reeds inside the park itself. The White-breasted Waterhen is a dark, slaty bird with a clean white face, breast and belly, which makes him look like an old lady with a neatly-set *ghunghat*! Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) were also scarce. I saw only one of them. House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) however, were one too many. We saw a lone Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) on the ground and pretty much away from the water. I never saw Herons too far away from water.



Indian Pond Heron (Photo: Binu D Nair)

Coming to the story of the lake.

The happy landmark of our twin cities, the Hussain Sagar Lake was built in the 16th century during the reign of Ibrahim Quli Qutub Shah. It is a sprawling artificial lake that holds water perennially and was originally built to meet the water and irrigation needs of the city. Believe it or not, "The lake was once notorious as a suicide location. This has reduced in the last few decades, possibly due to the worsening water quality," says Wikipedia!



Squirrel carrying plastic waste (Photo: Binu D Nair)

We got to see firsthand, the ongoing dredging operation in the Hussain Sagar Lake. Mr Chandramohan Reddy and Mr Nagi Reddy briefed us about this arduous and time-consuming task. Over the years, the lake has gathered innumerable tons of silt at the estuaries of five inlet drains which emptied sewage and highly toxic industrial effluents into the lake. Silt is a sedimentary material consisting of very fine particles intermediate in size between sand and clay. These drains bring in effluents that pollute and damage the health of the lake, thereby affecting the microorganisms, animal and bird life dependent on it. This ongoing project is intended to remove the silt by dredging. In all, a staggering five lakh cubic meters (cu.m.) of silt has to be removed. About one lakh cu.m. has already been removed until now. Four to go! Huge machines such as Long Reach Excavators and Tracked Dumpers are being pressed into service for dredging and de-silting. The silt from the lake bed is first pumped up and sent to a huge separator machine that sifts the bigger sand

particles, which can be used for construction and other purposes. Plastic and other debris from the lake is also separated here and removed. The remaining silt is allowed to remain on land for few days till the water drains out and totally dries it. Once dry, the silt is carried by trucks and dumped at designated dumpyards located outside the city limits. One of the construction workers told me that the soil on which the silt is laid becomes very fertile. Proof was a green leafy vegetable plant (*thotakoora* in Telugu) which had grown much taller than its normal height with very healthy leaves.

A huge Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) is also being set up. The water from all the drains will be diverted to the STP and will be let into the lake only after being properly treated. Once this dredging and de-silting operation is complete, let us hope that our Hussain Sagar Lake will be thoroughly cleansed, so that all the living beings dependent on it will thrive and the lake itself will regain its past glory, say in about two or three years. Totally worth the wait, I would say.

After watching and learning about the lake cleaning process, our famished group was treated to an excellent snacks breakfast teamed with splendid tea! Thanks again to the officials accompanying us. We relished gratefully and cheerfully!

After breakfast, we were ready to learn more about the Cactus Park. While the total area of Sanjeevaiah Park is 95 acres, the Cactus Park took root on a six-acre stretch in 2008-09. At one point in time, perhaps in 2007, there was a proposal to convert said park into an entertainment and recreation center with amphitheatre, party zone, amusement park for kids, monorail, cable cars, indoor swimming pool and food courts etc.

Some members of the BSAP were instrumental in vehemently protesting against such a proposal and suggesting instead, for the increase in green cover by planting more trees endemic to our region; creating a butterfly park by propagating suitable mother plants; developing a large cactus garden on the lines of the Chandigarh Cactus Park and construction of a 'broad walk' along the periphery and partially in the lake waters, with aquatic reeds on either side. (Source: Pitta, Volume 4 Number 6, June 2007)

The Cactus Park now has 38 varieties of cacti brought from all over India and abroad. Artificial desert-like conditions were created by designing proper drainage system with sandy soil and rocky, undulating terrain, as cactus thrives in dry soil. The moderate climate of Hyderabad is also conducive to cactus growth. It is a matter of pride for us Hyderabadis, that this Cactus Park is the largest in India in terms of area and variety.

Soon, it was time to go home. Thus ended yet another enjoyable and fruitful birding trip under a sunless and not-so-blue sky.

Here are the birds we saw....

	Status	Species	Scientific name
1	R	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
2	R	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
3	R	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
4	R	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
5	R	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
6	R	Black Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
7	R	Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
8	R	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
9	R	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
10	R	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
11	R	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
12	R	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
13	R	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
14	R	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
15	R	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>
16	R	Blue Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>
17	R	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
18	R	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
19	R	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
20	R	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>
21	R	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
22	R	Common Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
23	R	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>
24	R	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
25	R	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
26	R	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
27	R	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
28	R	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
29	R	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
30	R	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
31	R	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
32	R	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
33	R	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus</i>
34	R	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
35	R	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
36	R	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
37	R	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
38	R	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
39	R	Asian Pied Starling	<i>Sturnus contra</i>
40	R	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
41	R	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>

42	R	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
43	R	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
44		Cotton Pygmy-goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>

Report – Birdwatching Camp by the Indian Army Secunderabad Cantt. – 3rd to 8th June 2013

Text & photos courtesy: Wg Cdr (Retd) Y Prakash Rao



The author explaining about Purple-rumped Sunbirds to participants

A Bird Watching Camp was organised by the Indian Army at Secunderabad Cantonment as part of the Summer Adventure Activities for children of the Bison Division from 3rd to 8th June 2013. The aim of the camp was to initiate the children into the world of birds, and in the process generate awareness about our environment.

to give the children an overview of the essentials of Bird Watching and the Schedule of Work for each day. Shafaat Ulla addressed the children and welcomed them to the Camp. I gave a presentation and briefed the children on the skills to recognize birds by their colours, body parts, shapes and calls. Thereafter, the children were briefed by Colonel PS Bindra, the Director of the Camp, on the safety precautions and certain Dos & Don'ts to be followed during the Camp.



Rashid showing a Common Tailorbird nest

The schedule for the Camp was chalked out in partnership with BSAP. Representatives from BSAP including Surekha, Sharada, Shafaat Ulla, Rashid, Nanda Kumar and myself introduced the nuances of Bird Watching to the children. A curtain raiser was organised on 1st June at one of the Army's auditoriums in order



Shafaat Ulla addressing the children



Participants examining some of the resources

The Indian Army left no stone unturned to make the Camp a roaring success. During the preparatory stage Major Prasad personally motivated the children to join in and liaised with all the related departments/organisations to ensure smooth conduct of the program. Handouts drafted by JVD Moorthy on '**A Beginner's Guide to Birding**' were distributed to all the children. Binoculars and Field Guides were procured in sufficient numbers to enable correlation and assimilation. Caps and Eye-shades were distributed to all the children, and they were given customised Field Note Books and taught the method of filling them up.

The day-wise schedule was worked out with a view to expose the children to birds found in different types of biospheres and habitats. We visited Secunderabad Cantt, Shamirpet lake and the Nehru Zoological Park during this period.

The response was overwhelming as children of all ages flocked to the Camp, with an average strength of 50-60 per day, with the maximum attendance being on the visit to Nehru Zoological Park in which a total of 83 children turned up. There were officers, ladies and Army Personnel who volunteered to conduct and help in all other administrative aspects. On any given day a convoy of 7-8 vehicles filled with chirpy children was seen chugging away to the destination.



The participants at Nehru Zoological Park



Col Bindra explaining scan techniques to the children

Each day, the bird watching trip was followed by a generous dose of snacks and beverages. Thereafter, games and quiz competitions were conducted and spot prizes were doled out to the early birds with the right answers. Participation certificates were presented to all the children who attended the camps for at least four days.



Participants during a break at Bison House



The author conducting a Daily Quiz as Maj Prasad looks on

The children showed tremendous zeal and enthusiasm that spurred the volunteers to provide them with greater exposure and insight into the world of birds. In addition to the knowledge on Bird Watching, the children were given some info on the flora and fauna in the area, and ways to enrich their environment so that birds would flock around their houses. It was very encouraging to see the children filling in the Field Notes. Prizes were distributed to the children for methodical preparation of the tour notes. In all, the planning and execution of the Camp was flawless, true to the traditions of the Indian Army.



Mrs Mathson presenting a memento to Shafaat Ulla



Some members of the organizing team

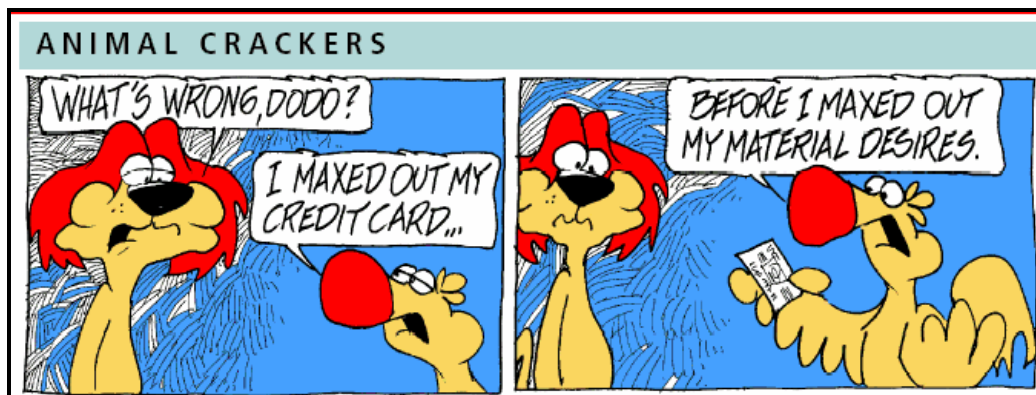
New BSAP Executive Committee in place

The Annual General Meeting of the BSAP was held on 20th June 2013. The following are the members of the new Executive Committee, which will be in place for a term of two years:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Aasheesh Pittie | 6. K Bharadwaj |
| 2. JVD Moorthy | 7. Sushil Kapadia |
| 3. MS Kulkarni | 8. Asif Husain |
| 4. Shafaat Ulla | 9. Surekha Aitabathula |
| 5. Nanda Kumar | 10. Umesh Mani |

Further details about the AGM will be shared in the Pitta next month.

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 13-09-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)



Indian Roller (Sainikpuri, 11-04-2010)


Order: Coraciiformes
Family: Coraciidae
Genus: *Coracias*
Species: *C. benghalensis*
Size: 26-27 cm

Description & distribution: The Indian Roller is a mid-sized member of the roller family of birds. It is widely distributed across tropical Asia, from Iraq eastwards across the Indian sub-continent (including Lakshadweep, the Maldives and Sri Lanka), all the way to Indo-China, and the largest populations of the Indian Roller are in India. It has a blue vent and crown, lilac-purplish neck and throat with white shaft streaks, brownish breast, sky-blue tail with a Prussian-blue terminal band and dull-green central feathers. The primaries are deep purplish-blue with a band of pale blue. It also has a bare ochre patch around the eye. The Indian Roller has a long and compressed bill with a curved upper edge and hooked tip, rictal bristles at the base, and long exposed nostrils. The feet have three forward-pointing toes, which appear to be joined at the base. Three sub-species are generally recognized:

1. The nominate, found from Iraq east across to India, north of the Vindhyas;
2. *C. b. indicus*, seen in peninsular India and Sri Lanka, which has a darker reddish collar on the hind neck (not seen in the nominate);
3. *C. b. affinis*, found in north-eastern India and South-east Asia (Thailand, Myanmar, Indo-China), which is darker, larger and has a purplish-brown, unstreaked face and breast, and deeper-blue underwing coverts.

Four states of India have selected the Indian Roller as their State Bird – Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and Orissa.

Behaviour: The Indian Roller can usually be seen perched on exposed trees, wires or lamp-posts, in scrub forest, open grassland or cultivation. It comes down to the ground to capture prey, which may include ground insects like beetles, grasshoppers and crickets, small reptiles and snakes, or amphibians like frogs. They are known to take advantage of the disturbance caused by tractors to capture invertebrates, and are also attracted to fires or even artificial lights, for insects like winged termites. It also feeds on roadsides, sometimes leading to collisions with vehicles. It bathes in open water by plunge-diving, and this behaviour is often misinterpreted as fishing (though it may, occasionally, attempt to fish for food).

The call of the Indian Roller is a harsh, crow-like *chack*. It may also make other sounds, including metallic *boinks*, and is especially vocal during the breeding season. One sample can be heard here. 

Nesting: The Indian Roller breeds from March to June (slightly earlier in southern India). Perched displays include upward-pointed bills, bowing, wing drooping, tail fanning and allopreening, and it is especially known for its aerobatic display with the numerous twists and rolls that give the bird its English common name.

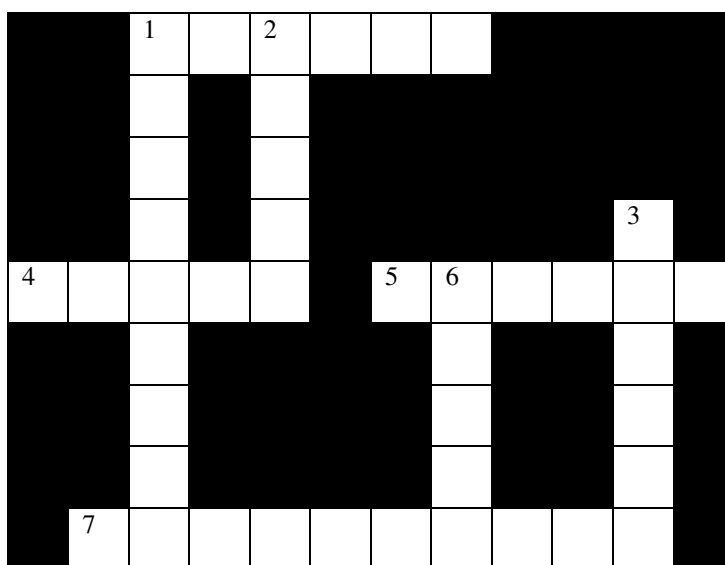
The Indian Roller builds its nest in niches in buildings, or in nest cavities made by tearing open rotten tree trunks; it may also use holes made by woodpeckers or wood-boring insects. The cavity itself is usually unlined, and may, at most, contain wood debris. The typical clutch consists of 3-7 white broad oval or nearly-spherical eggs. Both parents share incubation duties.

Local name: It is known as '*neelkanth*' or '*sabzak*' in Hindi, '*pala pitta*' in Telugu and '*pal kuruvi*' or '*kottai kili*' in Tamil.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #19

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)

**ACROSS**

- 1 - I'm on the same page with this bird (6)
 4 - This bird operates mechanically (5)
 5 - Member of the Crow family (6)
 7 - Seabird regularly migrates the longest distance (6,4)

DOWN

- 1 - This bird occupies the margins of Eire I leave out twice (9)
 2 - Bighead attacks GE with hesitation (5)
 3 - Woe befalls this bird on drinking gin (6)
 6 - This bird uses a towel? (5)

Solutions to Crossword #18 (Pitta, June 2013)

ACROSS: 1 – PELICAN, 4 – PLUMAGE, 7 – MONTAGU'S HARRIER, 8 – SWIFT, 9 - MARTIN

DOWN: 2 – LAMMERGEIER, 3 – VERDITER, 5 – SMEW, 6 – BROOD

For Private Circulation Only

Editor: Shanti Mani

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 8 August 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 18th August 2013: Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest. Meeting point: 6.00AM, Punjagutta Cross-roads.

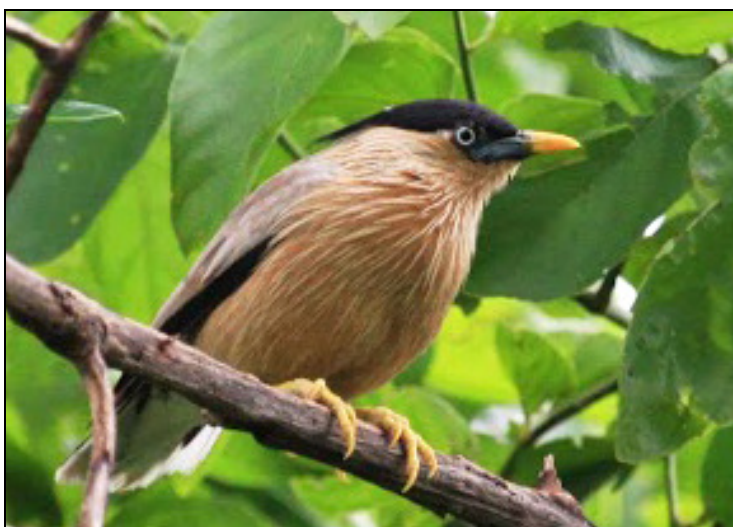
Besides being a pleasant woodland walk, Ananthagiri has always been very productive from the birding viewpoint, and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White-eyes, Chloropsis, Orange-headed Ground Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

**INDOOR MEETING: Talk on 'Birds' Some tales from Mizoram and around' by Nimesh Ved
Thursday, 14th August 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)**

For several years, Nimesh has been a part of teams in Mizoram and Meghalaya that worked towards understanding the issues in the landscape and joining hands with people to conserve the biodiversity. He will share his experiences with select birds he came across in course of his meanderings in the region and through these, attempt to give a glimpse of the region as well.

Trip Report – Narsapur Forest – 21st July 2013

Hari Krishnan



Brahminy Starling (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

When I dialed Surekha's number to enquire about the BSAP field outing, what I was looking for – as a person with zero bird watching expertise – was for a weekend getaway and some memorable photography. I knew I was going to tag along the moment I hung up. At home, my family was shocked that I volunteered to be up before the sun on a Sunday. I was to show up at Panjagutta at 06.00AM, from where we were to proceed with the group. It was about 06.30AM as we left Panjagutta for Narsapur.

I and another first-timer – Aishwarya – travelled with Surekha and Chaudhary uncle, who as I would soon realize, is an avid and experienced birder. In less than 5 minutes into the trip, I already felt at ease. In the next half hour, Surekha (coordinator for the trip) got more phone calls than I had had in the whole week. We knew there were about 20 people in all, in about a dozen cars, headed towards Narsapur. After a quick tea-break near the Air Force Station, Dundigal, where we spotted the first bird of the trip, a Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) perched on a lamp post, we reached Narsapur at around 08.00AM.



Plum-headed Parakeet (female) (Photo: Hari Krishnan)

There were about 30 of us in all, and everyone were soon kitted up with binoculars, cameras and tripods. Even before I had stepped out of the car, the first bird was spotted by someone. A female Plum-Headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), I was told. After about two minutes of staring in absolute oblivion, I saw my first bird ever as a birder. She was on a bush, well-camouflaged, except to an experienced birder's eye. On another day, I would have called it a parrot and moved on, but not today. I remembered a discussion on the way, that parrots (which are uncommon in India) were not the same as parakeets! My first learning of the day. After the parakeet obliged the Sunday morning paparazzi for a bit, she flew away, and we proceeded.



Yellow-eyed Babbler (Photo: Hari Krishnan)

I was told that because it was the rainy season, spotting birds might not be very easy. But then, we seemed to have been blessed, as soon the best spotters of the group had started seeing birds everywhere they looked! Dheeraj, Sathvik and others blessed with a "bird's eye" continued to point fingers in almost every direction and guide us towards them. Soon, we had seen woodpeckers, mynas, kingfishers, doves, bulbuls, cuckoos, shrikes, storks, and many others.



Black-rumped Flameback (Photo: Hari Krishnan)



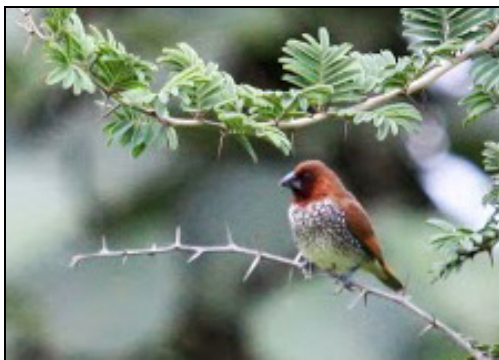
Jungle Babbler (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Everyone had their own equipment. While some walked around with their binoculars, some had illustrated books with lists of birds, and we had our camera. I learned more about birds in those 3 or 4 hours, than I have in my entire life. But the interactions also extended beyond birding – from discussions on "The Sound of Music", Hyderabad Hindi (while lunching under a tree), culture, movies and more.

The list of birds that were spotted went from 10 to 20 and more, before we ended up with a total of about 50 by the time the trip ended. An equal delight to the photographers and the birders, the trip ended with everyone meeting up for a bit at the Narsapur lake, before dispersing back to Hyderabad.



Great Tit (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)



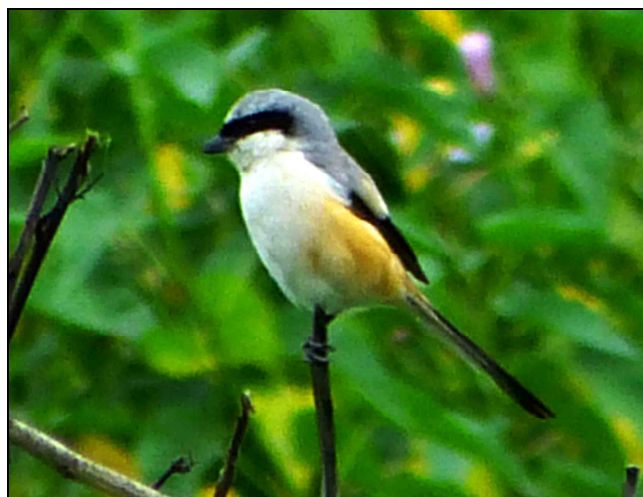
Scaly-breasted Munia (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

I would like to thank Surekha for introducing me to BSAP, Chaudhary uncle for being kind enough to let us tag along in his car, Sathvik and Dheeraj for being the most amazing spotters, and everyone else for their enthusiasm and passion for birding. For a newbie like me, the trip was a great encouragement. I might not yet name a bird correctly, but I sure can tell the difference between a parrot and a parakeet. As a birder, that's a start!

List of birds seen on the trip

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
2	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>
3	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
4	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
5	White-naped Woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>
6	Common Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
7	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
8	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
9	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
10	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
11	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
12	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
13	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
14	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pendicarianus</i>
15	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
16	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
17	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
18	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
19	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
20	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>
21	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
22	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
23	Grey-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
24	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
25	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
26	Pied Crested Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
27	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
28	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>

29	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
30	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
31	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
32	Indian Silverbill	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>
33	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
34	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
35	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
36	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
37	Yellow-eyed Babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>
38	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
39	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>
40	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
41	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
42	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
43	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
44	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
45	Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
46	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
47	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
48	Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
49	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
50	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
51	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>
52	Black Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
53	Streak-throated Swallow	<i>Hirundo fluvicola</i>
54	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
55	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>



Long-tailed Shrike (Photo: Hari Krishnan)

New BSAP Executive Committee

The following are the office-bearers of the new Executive Committee, which will be in place for a term of two years:

1. Aasheesh Pittie	President
2. JVD Moorty	Vice President
3. MS Kulkarni	Vice President
4. Shafaat Ulla	Honorary Secretary
5. Nanda Kumar	Honorary Treasurer
6. K Bharadwaj	Committee Member
7. Sushil Kapadia	Committee Member
8. Asif Husain	Committee Member
9. Surekha Aitabathula	Committee Member
10. Umesh Mani	Committee Member

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, Chennai, 21-04-2013)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)




Indian Pond Heron breeding (L) and non-breeding (R)

(Sainikpuri, 10-09-2010 & Lotus Pond, 13-11-2010)

Order: Pelecaniformes
Family: Ardeidae
Genus: *Ardeola*
Species: *A. grayii*
Size: 42-45 cm

Description & distribution: The Indian Pond Heron is a small heron. Widely distributed from Iran eastwards across India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, it is very common in India. Further east, it is replaced by the Chinese Pond Heron and the Javan Pond Heron. The Indian Pond Heron is a stocky bird, with a short neck, thick bill and a buff-brown back. The neck feathers grow longer during summer, and some individuals have been known to develop red legs during breeding. The generally dull appearance, however, transforms when the bird takes flight, with the bright white wings contrasting with the streaked olive-brown colours of the body. The camouflage due to the appearance is so effective that the bird may allow one to approach quite close, before it actually moves away.

Behaviour: The Indian Pond Heron can usually be found stalking prey along the edges of small streams or water bodies, but it is easy to miss due to the excellent camouflage. It is usually a solitary forager, but small groups may occasionally be seen foraging in close proximity, especially in dry seasons, in small wetlands having high concentration of prey. They may also forage for food near garbage dumps and, in dry seasons, even on well-watered lawns and dry grassland. At such times, they often allow fairly close approaches before getting flushed. It may roost alone or, sometimes, in small communal roosts, even in urban areas.

The usual habitat is marshy wetlands. However, while they generally prefer the edges of ponds, they frequently access deeper water by walking on floating vegetation like water hyacinth, and may even swim after prey. They have also been seen to fly, either to catch fishes leaping out of the water, or to drive frogs or fish towards the shore. The diet of the Indian Pond Heron includes fishes, tadpoles, crustaceans, aquatic insects and amphibians; it may also pick up leeches and, in non-wetland areas, other insects like crickets, dragonflies and bees. While generally silent, the Indian Pond Heron does occasionally utter a harsh croak, especially when near their nests or if startled. One sample can be heard here. 

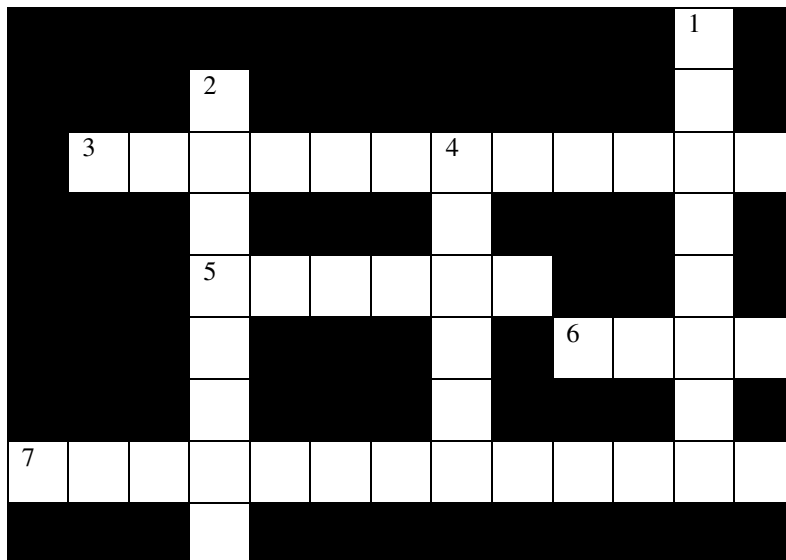
Nesting: The Indian Pond Heron breeds prior to the monsoons. It builds its nest in small colonies, often along with other waders. The nest is usually built on platforms of sticks in leafy trees or shrubs, at a height of 9 to 10 metres. The male collects the nesting material and the female constructs the actual nest. The typical clutch consists of 3-5 eggs, which hatch at different times from 18 to 24 days of incubation. Both parents share feeding duties. Undisturbed nest sites may be reused year after year.

Local name: The Indian Pond Heron is known as '*bagla*' in Hindi, '*konga*' or '*guddi konga*' in Telugu and '*kulathu kokku*' in Tamil. The habit of standing still and flushing only at the last moment has led to beliefs that it is semi-blind, which is reflected in some vernacular names also – it is also known as '*andha bagla*' in Hindi, '*kuruttu kokku*' in Tamil, '*andh bak*' in Sanskrit and '*kana koka*' in Sinhala (which translates to 'half-blind heron').

BIRDING CROSSWORD #20

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 3 - He throws it at these birds (12)
5 - Southern hero tastes victory when he performs this action (5)
6 - Air Force Officer loses Emergency Room command on seeing this flight arm (4)
7 - Calls monastery endlessly for this bird (8,5)

DOWN

- 1 - I have one part of this bird (8)
2 - Jan is right about this bird (8)
4 - These birds fetch up on the Northern shore (6)

Solutions to Crossword #19 (Pitta, July 2013)

ACROSS: 1 – MAGPIE, 4 – CRANE, 5 – CORVID, 7 – ARCTIC TERN

DOWN: 1- MERGANSER, 2 – GREBE, 3 – WIGEON, 6 – OWLET

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 9 September 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 15th September 2013: Ameenpur Lake, 6.30AM. Meeting point: 6.00AM, Punjagutta Cross-roads.

A recently 're-discovered' birding site, Ameenpur Lake promises a good mix of water birds, waders and grassland birds, among others. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Dr P Sivaramakrishna, Director, SAKTI.

Thursday, 11th September 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

SAKTI is an NGO working for the welfare of the Chenchu tribe in Andhra Pradesh. Dr Sivaramakrishna will speak about the activities of SAKTI, and will also discuss the book 'Nallamalalo Chenchu Prapancham' ('The Chenchu world in Nallamala forest'), which is a documentation of the traditional forest management practices followed by the Chenchu tribe.

Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest – 18th August 2013

Nupur Sengupta



Photo: Nupur Sengupta

It was announced finally - the BSAP field trip for August to the Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest. This was the most awaited one for me as I had missed all the previous trips to Ananthagiri, and to rub it in, each time I had to listen to the long list of birds sighted!

Ananthagiri Reserve forest is about 90 km from Hyderabad and just six km from Vikarabad. Located in Rangareddy District, the Forest is at the origin of the Musi River. The lush greenery in the hills offers a wonderful opportunity to spot the wildlife inhabiting

the surrounding forest. Ananthagiri is also home to the ancient Anantha Padmanabhaswamy Temple.

As always, the gang gathered at Punjagutta at 06.00AM, and Shafaat Uncle and Surekha were busy coordinating the eager birders. After judicious distribution of birders into the cars, we headed out at 06.15AM. Three more cars joined the happy BSAP convoy from Masab Tank.



Photo: Hemant Kumar

After crossing the city traffic, specifically after Chilkur, the drive was wonderful, what with the bird sightings in a cool and glorious morning. We started listing down the sightings which expectedly had the Munias, Weavers, Mynas, Doves, Egrets, Crows and Black-shouldered Kites. Shafaat Uncle, in the meantime, coordinated with all the members and planned for a tea-break near Vikarabad. But before that a Black-shouldered Kite made us stop in our tracks! It flew from the right side of the road towards the left, carrying its breakfast, which looked like a mouse. It sat on the ground ever so briefly and flew away in less than fifteen seconds.

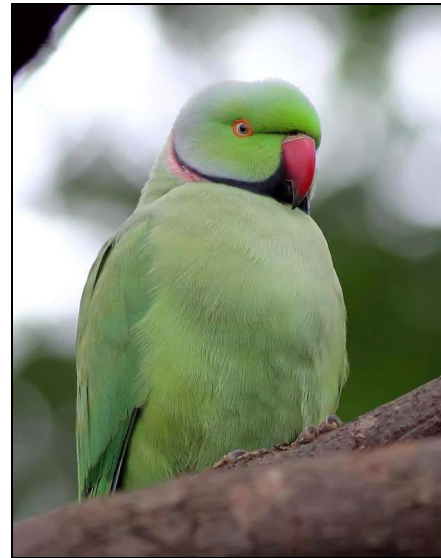


Jungle Babbler (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

We stopped for tea at around 08.00AM where we met the other fellow birders. Post nice tea, we started again in about 15-20 minutes. Just 4-5 km short of the temple, we stopped at a wide clearing on the right side of the road. We took a short walk through the muddy pathways trying to sight some bush birds, but not many sightings here! So after an exciting photo session of the group and its cars, we finally started for our actual site. On the way, we glimpsed the Grey Francolins, Indian Peafowls, Green Bee-eaters, Asian Openbills, Indian Pond Herons, Black Drongos, Rufous Treepies, and also an Indian Grey Hornbill flying across the road.

It was almost 09.00AM by the time we reached the temple, so we decided to complete the combo breakfast before proceeding for the trek. The sandwiches, pies, cakes, *parantha*, biscuits, fruits

made the list too long for the buffet! During that time, we spotted flocks of Rose-ringed Parakeets flying in the trees and also on a dangerously-wired telegraph pole.



Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

At around 09.30AM, we took the trekking trail that begins from the temple. The first sighting was a pair of Indian Grey Hornbills, flying around, most probably nesting, and then a White-browed Wagtail. The forest was full of huge ancient trees forming a canopy that completely covered us overhead. The morning was a bit cloudy so the sightings were difficult, though the forest was full of bird calls. The trail was also muddy as a result of continuous heavy rains during the previous days. Every flutter of the leaf and every movement in the trees threw up only the Babblers and the Red-vented Bulbuls in multiple flocks on this day!

Suddenly in front of us, a Wild Boar swiftly ran and crossed our path from left to right, stopping Sharada in her tracks! We also sighted Common Iora, Tawny-bellied Babbler, White-bellied Drongo, Great Tit and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.



Common Iora (Photo: Hemant Kumar)



White-bellied Drongo (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

The list was getting longer with time as we proceeded through the forest thicket. The team was moving in small groups of 4-5 members and it increased the visibility of small and shy birds like White-browed Fantail, Oriental White-eye, Pied Crested Cuckoo, and several others.



Large Grey Babbler (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

After walking for about one-and-a-half hours, we reached a small clearing from where we decided to walk back, because the plan was to visit another site - a water body which was discovered by Shafaat Uncle and Ishrat some days back! We continued our birding even as we came out of the forest, while elongating the list. We had tea together and started for the Sarpanpally Water Tank Project Site. Once again, the drive mesmerized our senses with a gorgeous view of the landscape that looked like lush European meadows! I also got a fabulous glimpse of the beautiful white Asian Paradise-flycatcher. It was a male, sitting on a telegraph wire on the field. A very unusual but very obvious sighting!



Asian Koel Male (Photo: Hemant Kumar)



Asian Koel Female (Photo: Hemant Kumar)



Red-rumped Swallow (Photo: Hemant Kumar)



River Tern (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

We reached the tank at around 12.45PM. It was a pretty large reservoir meant for the irrigation of the surrounding agricultural lands. We spent leisurely time here, while spotting the Red-rumped Swallow playing in a small mud-pit, an Indian Bushlark moving inside the grass, a pair of River Terns circling above the water body, a Coppersmith Barbet flitting in the branches of a huge banyan tree and a Plain Prinia gathering nesting material.



Plain Prinia (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)



Grey-breasted Prinia (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

The place was so beautiful and serene that we decided on the spot to hold a cookout here soon! We could not hold back ourselves from thanking Shafaat Uncle for bringing us to this fabulous place!

Finally when we all started feeling the need for fuel again, we started our return journey. Once again, we enjoyed the drive, stopped to take group photographs (courtesy Hemant!) at a chosen spot and continued bird watching *en route*. At one place, we saw a flock of House Sparrows which Surekha counted to be around 22. On the way back home, we stopped for a late lunch at a roadside hotel, where we saw another flock of House Sparrows - this time around, 18 of them. They were happily feeding near the road, in front of the hotel. We were all so hungry that we tackled our *veg thalis* with full concentration and speed! We drove back after lunch and dispersed from the starting point, with wishes to see many more birds in the next trip.



Photo: Nupur Sengupta

List of birds seen on the trip

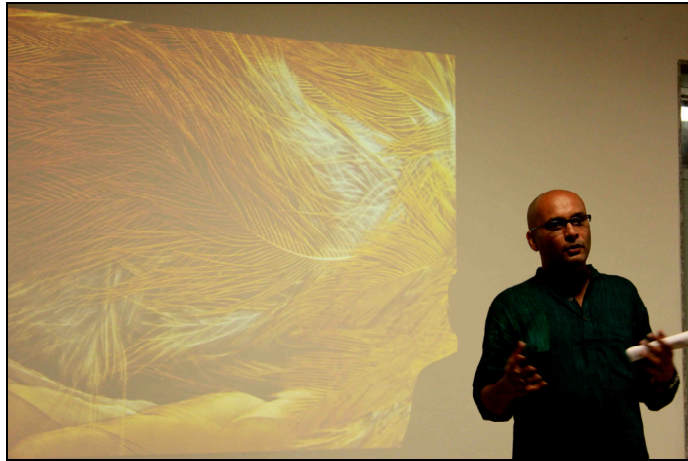
S. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Location
1	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	En route
2	Jungle Bush Quail	<i>Perdicula asiatica</i>	At the site
3	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	En route
4	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	At the site
5	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
6	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>	En route & At the site
7	Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	En route
8	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	En route
9	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	En route
10	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	En route
11	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	En route
12	Pied Crested Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	At the site
13	Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenocophaeus viridirostris</i>	At the site
14	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	En route
15	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	At the site
16	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	At the site
17	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	En route
18	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	En route
19	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	En route
20	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	En route
21	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	At the site
22	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
23	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	En route
24	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	En route
25	Cormorant (in flight)	<i>Phalacrocorax sp.</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
26	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	En route
27	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>	En route
28	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	En route
29	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	En route
30	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	En route
31	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	En route
32	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	En route
33	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	En route
34	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	En route
35	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	En route
36	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	At the site

37	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	At the site
38	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	En route
39	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	At the site
40	Asian Paradise-flycatcher (white male)	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	En route
41	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	At the site
42	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>	At the site
43	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	At the site
44	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	En-route & At the site
45	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	At the site
46	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	At the site
47	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
48	Streak-throated Swallow	<i>Hirundo fluvicola</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
49	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
50	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	At the site
51	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>	En route
52	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
53	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
54	Grey-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	At the site
55	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	At the site
56	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	At the site
57	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	At the site
58	Yellow-billed (White-headed) Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	At the site
59	Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>	At the site
60	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>	At the site
61	Indian Bushlark	<i>Mirafra erythroptera</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
62	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
63	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	Sarpanpally water tank
64	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	En route
65	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	At the site
66	Streaked Weaver	<i>Ploceus manyar</i>	En route
67	Indian Silverbill	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>	En route
68	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	En route

Report – Indoor Meeting

Talk by Mr Nimesh Ved – “Birds: some tales from Mizoram and around” – 14th August 2013

Text: Anjali Pande; Photos: Sharada Annamaraju



Nimesh Ved addressing the gathering

On 14th August the guest speaker of our indoor meeting was Mr. Nimesh Ved, a conservation education (CE) expert who proved to be the best resource person for an audience waiting to hear the story behind the sad state of Amur falcons in Nagaland. With his vast experience of working with local people Nimesh could explain the socio-cultural intricacies involved in conservation conflicts such as in the case of large scale killings of Amur falcons. Nimesh has worked with the Samrakshan Trust in various conservation education programmes creating networks of Community Conserved Areas in Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Madhya Pradesh over a period of 9 years.

Talking at length about the life of tribals in the north eastern regions, their customs and their impact on conservation work, he narrated many interesting anecdotes from his own work.

Amur falcons come to Nagaland between October to December in a span of about 60 days. Locals mention seeing the falcons in numbers as high as 3000 per day, and Nimesh too said he had counted 1800 birds on one of his sightings. Though the figure of 10,000 birds killed per day is being contested, there is no denying the fact that the numbers are big. Nimesh mentioned how, one time in 2011, while traveling from Kohima he stopped for tea at Wokha and saw Amur falcons being sold openly, 3 birds for Rs 100. Fortunately the situation has improved since. People are being made aware of the importance of protecting the falcons. Every strategy that can work as deterrent is being used to stop people from killing and selling the falcons. The state government has put up notices saying that the falcon is a carrier of avian flu.

Nimesh also mentioned the interesting fact that there is no name for the Amur falcon in local languages, which makes him wonder if the migration route of the Amur falcon has changed in recent times, making them transit through Nagaland now in such large numbers. Perhaps because this is not the traditional route of the bird, the local tribal culture has yet to accommodate this bird in its practices including its linguistic vocabulary.

One environmentally damaging local agricultural practice is the shifting agricultural or Zoom cultivation. In areas around Doyang Reservoir as part of its conservation effort, the Government had tried to provide alternate livelihood to the locals by distributing fishing nets. Unfortunately, these nets are now being used to catch falcons. Nimesh observed that such ‘development’ can add to problems. This is where understanding of local tribal culture, beliefs and traditions becomes important while taking up conservation efforts.

Nimesh spoke about the elephant monitoring programme that was carried out for three years in Meghalaya. They recorded and monitored elephant movement in areas around Baghmara Reserve Forest and created detailed maps with exact GPS locations of the animals. During these extensive surveys Nimesh came across tribals who would put up artificial nests to lure Hill Mynas to breed in these nests. Hill Mynas are excellent mimics and the chicks fetch a good price when sold as pets. Nimesh mentioned a paper by the British ornithologist Brian Bertram in the Journal of BNHS from 1967 where this practice finds mention. In those days chicks from these areas used to be sold in markets as far away as Calcutta. Thankfully, this practice is slowly dying out.



Nimesh Ved explaining a point

Nimesh had an interesting encounter with a Common Kestrel in Saiha in Mizoram; the bird used to call every morning exactly between 6.00-6.30AM. Nimesh found the Common Kestrel to be actually quite common in that area - a fire lit by Assam Rifles soldiers at a camp around sundown drew about 30 Common Kestrels in a feeding frenzy, feasting on termites flying around the fire.

Another interesting incident involved what Nimesh believes was a Lesser Kestrel. Not being sure about the identification, as the photo had not come out well, he was listening to the call of the bird on his laptop, when he heard another bird responding from outside. Even when he stopped the recorded call, the bird outside kept calling - it WAS a Lesser Kestrel!

Another time, at Tuipang in Mizoram, Nimesh saw Common Hoopoes being sold for Rs 150 per bird. A forest ranger casually told him that the rate had come down from Rs 200 the previous month, and that the Hoopoe is consumed as medicine against lung diseases.

Nimesh narrated how local reality dislodged his belief that people do not eat raptors. Once he saw a claw which he thought looked like a raptor's claw. Not wanting to ask his colleague if the bird had been consumed by someone for fear of offending him, Nimesh asked to identify the bird from the claw using the bird guide. His colleague not only identified this particular raptor but also pointed out 2 eagle and 3 owl species in the bird book, saying he had eaten them, not forgetting to mention that only boys are allowed to eat raptors!

Once, Nimesh was showing a film about Point Calimere in Don Bosco School, with the intention of educating local children about the importance of protecting their environment. When a close-up of a Black-shouldered Kite came up on screen, one child took out his catapult and aimed at the kite. Nimesh was amazed by the fact that more than he could educate them, the children were educating him in local

culture! Efforts to wean away tribal hunters will have to really start with the motto "catch them young". Educating children in conserving nature can make a difference in communities where hunting, consuming and trading wild life is a deep-rooted part of culture.

Working through the Samrakshan Trust with some Government schools at Chakhang in Saiha (where Mrs Hume's Pheasant has been reported earlier), Nimesh was once screening a film for an audience, when some members got inspired and offered to take Nimesh to a good forest. The next day, Nimesh went with them and saw that there were a lot of traps in the forest - one small area had about 20 traps made from bent-over saplings or bamboo to catch the pheasants. They found a Yellow-browed Warbler and 2 Laughingthrushes in the traps, which they released. The technique used for making these elaborate traps is part of the traditional knowledge of the tribals.

Unlike the Amur falcon, great significance is attached to hornbills in local culture. Local languages have names for all the 5 hornbills that are found there. But hornbills are also disappearing, mainly due to habitat loss. Hornbills are connected with people's lives here. There are many proverbs and sayings around hornbills; for example, one saying compares a lazy woman to a hornbill. In many traditional tribal beliefs, the hornbill also figures prominently as a symbol of valour. One tribe in South Mizoram actually considers itself to have descended from Great Hornbills.

Hornbills make very good pets. Nimesh showed photos of Chika, a female Wreathed Hornbill from Aizawl that lived in the city, rode 20 km atop a bus every day, ate *puris* and fruits from vendors, and returned in the evening! Sadly, she happened to wander into a neighbouring commune, where she was shot by people who did not know that she was somebody's pet.



Chika, the Wreathed Hornbill

On the subject of environment conservation, Nimesh said that slowly awareness is increasing that environmental destruction is irreversible and whatever is left needs to be protected. People are trying to get back what they feel they are losing. Many local organizations and groups are active. Association for Environmental Protection publishes a newsletter on environment in English and Mizo languages. Jim Corbett's books have been translated into Mizo language. Nimesh showed a very interesting video of one environmental educator who was mimicking bird calls in his awareness session while showing a picture of the concerned bird. It was a very effective method of sensitizing people about local birds. In Arunachal Pradesh increasingly people are using casques of fiber instead of the real casques in their hornbill headgear.

According to Nimesh it is a positive point from the conservation perspective that in the north-eastern states, villages have a lot of unused land belonging to villagers, who come together to conserve forest patches and water. Villages make their own conservation rules, e.g. no water for commercial activities after Christmas, no cultivation of timber used in construction, etc. Such movements are found in many villages and so, sometimes more flora and fauna can be found on village lands than in protected areas. The one big threat to environment according to Nimesh is urbanization.

Through his informative talk peppered with delightful experiences, photos and anecdotes from the north-eastern states, Nimesh Ved helped us realise that just as humans are the main destroyers of environment today, it is only we humans who can save the environment from ourselves.

Links and references:

<http://nimesh-ved.blogspot.in/>

<http://www.samrakshan.org/>

<http://www.bl.uk/listentonature/specialinterestlang/langofbirds12.html>

Bertram, Brian 1967. Hill Myna Gracula religiosa Linnaeus breeding in artificial nests in Garo Hills, Assam. Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. 64(2): 369–370 (Journal article)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kX3UExrwj4> – a tribute to Chika on YouTube

BIRDING IN TIGER COUNTRY

Trip Report – Ranthambhor – April 2013

Surekha Aitabathula

Rajasthan, the State of Royals houses the Royal Bengal Tiger in a 1300 sq km stretch of Ranthambhor National Park. So off we went, Sagarika, Vinay and yours truly in mid April and sighted 65 bird species, a tiger and a tigress!

From Hyderabad to Jaipur and thence to Sawai Madhopur, in which district lies Ranthambhor, which has become synonymous with the tiger.

Our first pitstop was Jantar Mantar, the ancient observatory in Jaipur. This is the incredible astronomical instrument built by Maharaja Jai Singh the Second, between 1727 -1734. *Jantar* means instrument and *mantar* means formula.

The observatory consists of fourteen major geometric devices for measuring time, predicting eclipses, tracking stars, ascertaining the declinations of planets and determining the celestial altitudes and related ephemerides (coordinates of a celestial body). I was totally intimidated by the superior intellect that would have built this accurate geometrical, astronomical system, intended to probe the heavens. I felt an overwhelming respect and awe for their genius and did not even attempt to fathom anything because I knew that my intellect was too limited to understand such masterful authority on astronomy. All three of us simply gaped for long in uncomprehending admiration.

The Observatory was home to plenty of House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), Brown Rock Chats (*Cercomela fusca*), Laughing Doves (*Streptopelia senegalensis*), Collared Doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*), Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) and Blue Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*).

From Observatory to the Amer Fort, the principal tourist destination in Jaipur built by Raja Man Singh the First. The fort has a four-level layout plan (each with a courtyard) built with red sandstone and marble, consisting of the *Diwan-e-Aam* or the "Hall of Public Audience", the *Diwan-e-Khas* or the "Hall of Private Audience", the *Sheesh Mahal* (mirror palace) or *Jai Mandir*, and the *Sukh Niwas* - the royal bedrooms. Cool climes are artificially created in *Sukh Niwas* by harnessing and tunneling the wind through beautifully shaped little windows. Thus harnessed, the wind blows over several neat water channels and cascades within and outside the bedrooms - an ingenious cooling system that would have kept the royalty completely oblivious to the blistering summer heat typical of the desert terrain of Rajasthan. Modern day air-conditioning, take a walk!

A two-hour run by train to Sawai Madhopur District comfortably settled us down in a fabulous resort called Ranthambhor Bagh. The food was good, the rooms comfortable, the loos clean and the ACs very efficient. We

took off on our first safari to see the famous Ranthambhor Fort located inside the Park. This formidable thousand-year-old fort is said to have been built 700 feet above the surrounding plains! Five kilometers into the Tiger Reserve, you can see the beginning of the fort wall built on the rocky mountain range on your right. I couldn't help but marvel at this engineering feat. An impregnable fort wall ran sky-high along the flanks of the mountain.

What kind of fall-proof scaffolding did the construction labour use to build a wall with a 5.4 km circumference, along the rocky mountain edge which is a sheer abysmal drop? At 700 feet above the plains? Incredible. Unfathomable. I don't know the height of this fort wall but suffice to say that it seemed to rise steeply straight into the heavens above.

We saw four lifers in this fort - Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathami*), Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*), Painted Spurfowl (*Galloperdix lunulata*) and Greater Painted-snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*). The Painted-snipe, Painted Spurfowl and the Painted Sandgrouse all wear exquisite Nizam's jewellery! Striking colours and profusely aesthetic design.

The graceful Painted-snipe has short legs, a long reddish brown bill, a slightly decurved tip and a very striking plumage. This plump wader has a distinct white or pinkish eye patch, buff-spotted wings and short tail. The Painted-snipe is not related to the true snipes and differs from them in flight and appearance, being far more colorful and having longer legs than the snipes. It shows reversed sexual dimorphism - the female is larger and more brightly colored than the male, with the sides of its head, neck and throat a rich chestnut brown, a distinct necklace-like black band across the breast and forward pointing eyes. It inhabits reedy swamps and marshes, and is crepuscular, nocturnal and omnivorous.

The Painted Sandgrouse is a stout ground dweller with small pigeon-like head and short legs. It looks as though his whole base is resting on the ground. His plumage is also striking, barred with black, sandy yellow, white and chestnut colors. This gregarious bird wears a sinuous necklace just like the Painted-snipe does. The plumage is cryptic, generally being in shades of sandy brown, grey and buff, variously mottled and barred, enabling the birds to merge into the dusty landscape. There is a dense layer of underdown which helps insulate the bird from extremes of heat and cold. The feathers of the belly are specially adapted for absorbing water and retaining it, allowing adults, particularly males, to carry water to chicks that may be many miles away from watering holes. The amount of water that can be carried in this way is about 15 to 20 millilitres at a time. Oh! the heartwarming wonders of nature!

The Painted Spurfowl has bling factor. Males are brightly coloured and spotted boldly in white that shine like precious stones. It inhabits rocky hills and scrub forests. The male has three to four spurs and the females have two. They are found in small families of up to six individuals and generally stay in the undergrowth, rarely taking flight. They feed on berries, insects and flowers and visit waterholes early in the morning.

Another unmistakable beauty was the Crested Bunting. According to the book 'Latin Names of Indian Birds Explained', the name 'bunting' perhaps comes from the German word *bunt* meaning coloured. To decipher the Latin name, *melas* means black, *lophus* means crest and *lathamii* is named after English ornithologist and author John Latham. A stunning black and chestnut crested bird with the same colour scheme as that of the Crow Pheasant. The very defined crest on this bird looked marvellous with each strand, separately coiling back from his head in a proud curve. I could see the blue sky in between each of these clearly demarcated strands! Like the finest paint brush strokes! Its nest is a deep cup of grass lined with rootlets. "Partial to recently burnt, charred stony patches in dry grass and pole forest", says The Book of Indian Birds by Salim Ali about the habitat of this black and brown beauty.

The sighting of the Eurasian Thick-knee (*Burhinus oedipnemus*) was thrilling. A very large sad and doleful-eyed wader this. Its length ranges from 15 to 18 inches and wingspan ranges from 30 to 35 inches. Its large yellow eyes give it a reptilian or goggle-eyed appearance, and it has a strong yellow and black beak. Despite being classed as a wader this nocturnal creature prefers dry open habitat. Its loud wailing songs are reminiscent of that of the Curlews. It lays two to three eggs in a narrow scrape in the ground. We saw two of them on the edge of a lake, standing absolutely still and immobile. They did not shy away even when our vehicle got pretty close to it. This bird is neckless - the head emerges straight from the body and its big eyes are its striking feature.

Ranthambhor threw up innumerable Rufous Treepies (*Dendrociitta vagabunda*). The guide told us that this bird is known as the 'tiger toothpick' because he fearlessly picks/cleans the meat shreds stuck in the tiger's teeth. Also numerous were Oriental Magpie Robins (*Copsychus saularis*) and Plum-headed (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), Alexandrine (*Psittacula eupatria*) and Rose-ringed (*Psittacula krameri*) Parakeets.

Ranthambhor National Park has three large lakes, the Padam Talab, Malik Talab and Raj Bagh which are visible from the fortification walls and contribute to a landscape of forests with aquatic vegetation, which is the habitat of the Indian Tiger. The safari public is permitted entry only into a demarcated four hundred square kilometre area. I was told that 49 tigers roam free here. We saw two tigers in two consecutive days - the T-24 and the T-19 (tigers are known by numbers here). On day two, as we entered our specific zone, Sagarika and I whispered to each other, "This pretty much looks like tiger country" Even before we finished the

sentence, our guide fiercely hushed everybody up and the driver of our twenty-seater smoothly applied brakes. We found ourselves right in front of an ancient sentry/guard post in the thicket - a small four-walled structure with a dome that locals called the *gumbaz*. According to our guide there was a tiger taking a siesta inside the *gumbaz* which was built on a slightly raised mound of earth. Everybody in the vehicle just fell silent and froze in excited anticipation.

The *gumbaz* had two doorways and two windows. We trained our binoculars straight into one of the windows through the filigree of very slender and dry branches. Initially we saw nothing - just semi-darkness inside the *gumbaz*. And then suddenly our guide screamed softly, "There, there, there, I saw the tail swish!" Hope rose like a phoenix amongst us. We were on the verge of seeing the tiger in the wild! Looking through the binocs, our eyes and our hearts were literally willing the tiger to show itself to us. Suddenly, the tiger raised his head! *Achtung Baby!* A huge, broad and yellow silhouetted head with the clear outline of his relatively small black ears. We could see only the raised head but we could clearly visualise how the rest of his body must have been royally stretched supine. He lay down again to continue his siesta and vanished from our vision. After sighting honourable body parts like tail and head, we refused to back down and waited for another solid forty minutes. And then it happened! The tiger rose. Full length. A magnificent creature with a staggering presence. Matchless charisma. Fearless, solitary beauty. A skilled hunter. A born leader. An undisputed King.

If you ask me to describe his body language, it would be like "DON'T EVER MESS WITH ME IF YOU WISH TO LIVE." After stepping out of the *gumbaz*, he took long, fluid and feline strides and disappeared into the vegetation below. The drivers and guides of the safaris in Ranthambhor know their terrain like the back of their hands. The driver immediately instructed us to sit down, even as he engaged reverse gear and cut left into deep forest. He drove along parallel to the tiger's path as if he knew exactly where to converge. He took more than a couple of rights in full speed and brought us to a halt, right in front of the self-same tiger cooling himself in a pathetically small puddle of water. Sadly, there wasn't enough water to submerge his eleven feet body length. Just eight feet between us and the tiger. Mind you, he need not even leap, had he decided to squash our safari vehicle like a fly. You see, generally, a tiger's leap is about 33 feet! Absolute muscle power, superior strength and an awesome symbol of courage weighing 300 kilos! At this very moment, I recalled a description I once heard on National Geographic Channel - "His massive head itself weighs 15 kilos, the circumference of his neck is 90cms and his paws are the size of dinner plates"!

Flies were bothering him so he kept swishing his long and strong tail. It was the most surreal moment in our lives when he turned and looked at us! His expression? A penetrating gaze depicting royal indifference through incredibly beautiful and intense yellow eyes. What was he thinking? To hazard a guess, his look said that he thought we were a bunch of feeble gaping idiots.

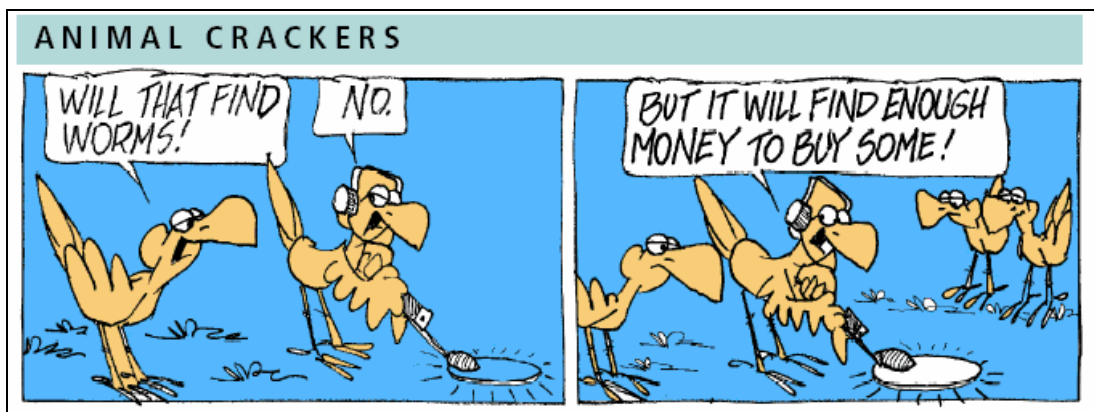
Spotting the tiger was a cathartic experience for me. I was simultaneously exalted and saddened. In the theater of the safari, when the vehicles mercilessly chase him and surround him, the tiger looked utterly clueless and obviously disturbed. There were more than a dozen vehicles carrying easily around 150 people who had an aggressive voyeuristic stance. At one point in time, scores of vehicles surrounded the tiger, cutting off his path, so he just meekly changed his path. The vehicles had earlier chased him for over half a kilometer. During the heightened excitement of tiger sighting, I saw a safari vehicle drive as close as one foot from the tiger, who dodged, hastened his pace and hastened into the shrubbery, to get away from all the sound and fury of wildlife tourism.

Sighting the tiger was an adrenalin rush no doubt, but somehow the big cat didn't look one bit fearsome, when we were chasing him. No power. No mystique. No dominance. No daunting presence. He just wanted to get away from us all. He didn't want us there in the first place. I know safaris generate revenue but I can't help feeling that we were intruding into and invading the tiger's need for solitude and territorial space (about 20 sq km per tiger), where he can do his hunting, resting, breeding and cub rearing in peace without being disturbed almost every day by safaris. Safaris disturb the tigers. Period.

I speak for myself when I say that, after my first ever tiger sighting, I have decided to dial down on the general clamour, the hype, the glamour and the flaunt value that we attach to tiger sighting. I feel sighting the tiger once is enough. If I wish to see the tiger repeatedly, I would only add to the congestion in Safari Sanctuaries. I really don't know how but we seriously need to back off a little from overcrowding the tiger. I am not taking liberties here and this is strictly personal opinion, when I say that photo entries of tigers and lions should not be allowed in any photo competitions/contests. Because these two big cats are very vulnerable to safari disturbances and yet they allow you to approach pretty close to them. Try getting this close to wild Elephants, African Buffaloes and Wild Bisons. You can't, unless you are suicidal.

All said and done, I thank my besties, Sagarika and Vinay, not only for their fantastic company but also for perfect organisation of this legendary trip. We came away ever so thrilled and satisfied and knew fully well that we will carry the fragrance of this trip forever. I for one was ecstatic to sight the birds and the tigers on their own turf but I was not sure if Wildlife Sanctuaries should be promoted as tourist attractions. Debatable, I guess.

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 04-10-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*)



Ashy Prinia

(Cherlapally, 19-09-2010)


Order: Passeriformes
Family: Cisticolidae
Genus: *Prinia*
Species: *P. socialis*
Size: 13-14 cm

Description & distribution: The Ashy Prinia is a small warbler, and is found in dry open grassland, open woodland, scrub and urban gardens. It is a resident breeder in most parts of its range, spread across most of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and western Myanmar. It is seen north upto the Himalayan foothills, and is absent in the desert areas of Rajasthan. It is easy to identify due to its distinctive colours. The northern populations show variation between breeding and non-breeding plumages, whereas other populations show no such differences.

The Ashy Prinia has a dark slaty-grey crown and upperparts, rufous underparts, and brown flanks. The wings are short and rounded, the short, straight bill is black, and the longish graduated brown tail is horizontally-barred below, with black sub-terminal spots. Eastern populations (*P. s. inglisi*), seen from West Bengal eastwards, are darker slaty above, deeper rufous on the flanks, and have a finer and shorter beak.

In winter, the northern populations (*P. s. stewartii*) develop a slightly elongated tail and warm brown upperparts. During breeding season, this race shows ash-grey upperparts, black crown and cheek with no supercilium and rufescent wings; in the non-breeding season, it develops a short white supercilium. The Sri Lankan endemic race (*P. s. brevicauda*) has a shorter tail and the juveniles have yellowish underparts and a distinct call.

Behaviour: The Ashy Prinia is a common bird in urban gardens and farmlands. Usually seen singly or in pairs, it frequents shrubs, though it will often visit the ground while

foraging for its diet of insects like grasshoppers, grubs, etc. The strong legs are used for hopping around on the ground, and the tail is usually held upright. It has several calls – a repetitive *tchup tchup tchup* or *zeet zeet zeet*, and a nasal *tee tee tee*. One sample can be heard here. It is also known to make a noise like ‘electric sparks’, or sometimes a loud snapping noise, while in flight. 

The Ashy Prinia is described by various authors as having two partial or complete moults during the year, once in spring (April-May) and again in autumn (October-November). It stays in pairs, but roosts singly on branches of small trees or shrubs.

Nesting: The breeding season varies from place to place, and has been recorded around the year, but most often after the monsoons. Breeding takes place between May-June in peninsular India, June-September in northern India and August-October or December-March in Sri Lanka. The Ashy Prinia delivers its song from the tops of bushes; males also make fluttery display flights while holding the tail upright. The nest is usually built close to the ground, in a shrub or in tall grass. The nest itself may be a flimsy cup made of several leaves sewn together with webs, a narrow ‘purse’ using grass stems or, simply, a flimsy ball of grass. The nest is lined with hair or grass and has an entrance at the side. On rare occasions, the Ashy Prinia has been observed to reuse material from old nests.

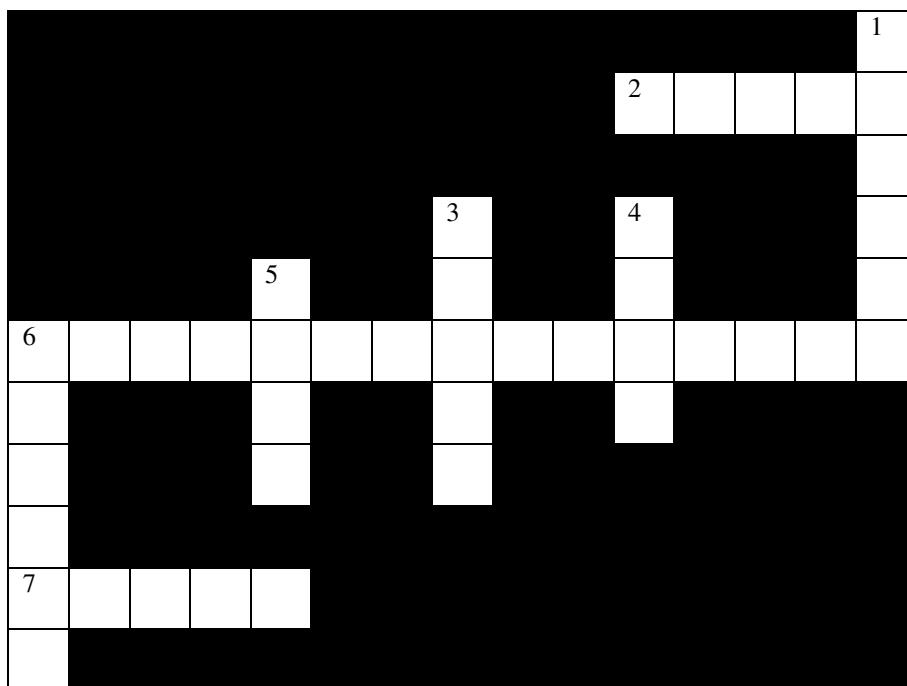
The typical clutch consists of 3-5 eggs, somewhat pointed oval, extremely glossy, and varying from brick-red to rich chestnut in colour. Both parents share incubation and feeding duties.

Local name: The Ashy Prinia is known as ‘*phutki*’ or ‘*kali phutki*’ in Hindi, ‘*budidarangu pitta*’ in Telugu and ‘*tinu kuruvi*’ in Tamil.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #21

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 2 - Find this predator among bears? (5)
6 - Earring harms, gives gout to this bird (8,7)
7 - This white tit should be blue? (5)

DOWN

- 1 - Attorney-General jeers endlessly at this bird (6)
3 - Is a Middle-Eastern bird found here? (5)
4 - Noah's vessel turns left to pick up this songbird? (4)
5 - Native American weapon gives up small particle for a hunter (6)
6 - Slim North American birds found in the Himalayas (6)

Solutions to Crossword #20 (Pitta, August 2013)

ACROSS: 3 – WHITETHROATS, 5 – HOVERS, 6 – WING, 7 – SCLATER'S MONAL

DOWN: 1- PETRONIA, 2 – NIGHTJAR, 4 – HERONS

For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 10 October 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 27th October 2013: Fox Sagar / Shamirpet backwaters, 6.30AM. Meeting point: 6.00AM, near Mangatrai Pearls.

Fox Sagar and the backwaters of Shamirpet are always known to throw up surprises and offer fulfilling birding. Keep an eye out for migrant water birds and raptors. Please carry enough snacks and water, and rain gear if needed. Please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532) to reconfirm details on car pooling and approximate meet-up timings, if you want to reach Shamirpet or Fox Sagar directly and skip one spot. This will be a half-day trip.

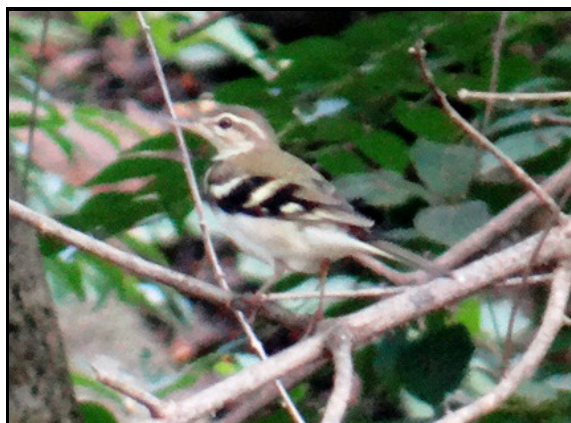
INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr Shankaran, Curator, Nehru Zoological Park.

Wednesday, 24th October 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Nehru Zoological Park celebrates its Golden Jubilee this year, and many programs have been organised by the Zoo to mark the occasion. In keeping with the same spirit, BSAP has requested the Curator of the Zoo, Mr. Shankaran to enlighten members about the various aspects of Zoo administration and the role played by the zoos in general in conservation of fauna.

Sighting of the Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) at Mallela Theertham
in the Nallamala Hills, Andhra Pradesh – September 2013

YSRK Prasad & Humayun Taher



Forest Wagtail (Photo: YSRK Prasad)

The Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) is a medium-sized passerine bird of the wagtail family *Motacillidae*. It has a very distinctive plumage that sets it apart from other wagtails and has the habit of wagging its tail sideways unlike the usual up and down movements of the other wagtail species. It is the only wagtail species that regularly inhabits and even nests in trees. They are found mainly in forested habitats, breeding in the temperate parts of East Asia and wintering across tropical Asia from India to Indonesia.

On 28th September 2013, the first author (Prasad) had occasion to visit the Mallela Theertham waterfalls (+16° 15' 58.20"E, +78° 51' 22.69"N) in the Northern Nallamala Hills. While birding around the area at about 12 noon, a solitary Forest Wagtail was spotted foraging amongst the trees about 0.5 km. from the main waterfalls. Photographs could be obtained and the identity of the bird was established from the very distinctive plumage, which was clearly visible.

The extant distribution records of this species are quite sparse from the Southern Part of India. Although known from most of the Southern states, it appears to have a very disjointed range. (In this, it is remarkably similar to the Rufous-bellied Eagle, which also has a very disjointed range in the Southern part of the peninsula). There is a considerable corpus of literature on the bird, but very little seems to be known about the range of the bird in Southern India; save for very general statements as to it being found in some parts of the southern peninsula. This prompted us to try and see whether we could find evidence of the bird as having been ever reported from this part of the country and, though we could not get any certain sightings from this specific area, we were nevertheless able to find some interesting records from Andhra Pradesh.

Jerdon mentions that the bird is "...common nowhere, and indeed rare in the South of India, in the bare table-land of Central India, and it is not recorded from the N. W. Provinces, nor the Himalayas. I have only procured it myself at Nellore, in my own garden, and on the Malabar Coast." (Jerdon, 1863). Several specimens in museums seem to have come mostly from Assam and the northern states, though there are a few specimens from Karnataka. Murray mentions that "In South India it is fairly common on the Neilgherries and in Coonoor, also in Malabar on the Coast." (Murray, 1890). There are several sight records from the Chengalpattu District of Tamil Nadu. The second author (Humayun) has sight records of the bird from the Madras Crocodile Bank on the East Coast Road close to Mamallapuram in Tamil Nadu. There is also a sight record from the Sriharikota Island in the Pulicat Lagoon (A.P. side). The second author also has a record and photograph of the species from a single bird seen at Maredumilli in September (1st September 2012).

Closer to Hyderabad, there is a sighting from the Mahavir Harina Vanasthali Deer Park in Vanasthalipuram from May 1988; another from the Nehru Zoological Park from October 1989. There is another record from Ananthagiri Hills, Vikarabad from April 2009. So the bird is not completely unknown from the Hyderabad region at least, and there are published records of the sightings.

The Vernay Scientific Survey of the Eastern Ghats did not meet with this bird anywhere during their work.

During the Hyderabad State Ornithological Survey, Dr. Salim Ali was not able to collect any specimens of this bird. However, there is a sight record of "a pair was noted in a small grassy clearing in (the) forest at Mananur, and a single bird was observed flying over the Forest Bungalow at Farahabad". (Ali, 1933) Both these sightings were in the month of October (12th and 17th October, 1931 respectively). He also goes on to state that "I did not come across this wagtail elsewhere within the state." In the same section, Dr. Ali says that this species has been recorded by Blanford from the Godavari Valley. He also mentions the Nellore record by Jerdon and goes on to say that he was unable to trace any records of the species between the sub-Himalayan tracts and the Western Coastal regions extending from Mahabaleshwar to Travancore. Dewar apparently has sight records from Madras.

Going by the available records, it appears that the closest anyone has come to this bird in this part of the state is Dr. Salim Ali with his Farahabad and Mannanur records. Otherwise the species remains very poorly represented in terms of published records from other parts of the state. It remains to be seen however, whether this is a stray record or whether more sightings are reported from these or other parts of the state. We request members of the BSAP to keep their eyes open for the species and to write in their sightings to us. We would be highly interested to learn about these and see if we can get further references of the presence of this species from other parts of the state.

References:

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DEDICATED TO THE CHENCHUS

Report – Indoor Meeting - Talk by Dr P Sivaramakrishna - 11th September 2013

Surekha Aitabathula

This month's indoor meeting saw a lecture by Dr P Sivaramakrishna on the Chenchu tribes of Andhra Pradesh.

Dr Sivaramakrishna has totally dedicated his life to the welfare of these tribes. His post-graduation in Literary Anthropology and doctorate in Tribal Knowledge Systems from Osmania University, have greatly helped him in putting into perspective and interpreting the Chenchu tribal dialect for the Government and the general public.

Dr Sivaramakrishna has exhaustively studied the oral tradition, music and dance of the Chenchus and brought it forth in a book titled "Nallmalalalo Chenchu Prapancham", which translates to "The World of Chenchus of Nallamala". Working as a *via media* between the Government and the Chenchus, he fights for their rights and oversees their welfare in all aspects of life.



Dr Sivaramakrishna addressing the gathering (Photo: Aasheesh Pittie)

The word Chenchu means innocent! Chenchu tribals inhabit the higher ranges of the Nallamala Forests between 1500 to 2800 feet. These ranges receive good rainfall and consequently the vegetation is rich and diverse.

Dr Sivaramakrishna told us that traditionally, the Chenchus were hunter-gatherers, and their venture into agriculture is very nascent - since the Government enforced the Forest Rights Act. Hunting having come to a standstill, the Chenchus practise farming, gather honey and have got into fishing in a big way. Besides, they produce cosmetic turmeric and *ghee*.

They eat mostly forest produce, including a particular gum found on tree trunks, which they mix with tamarind to consume as an energiser. They also favor the tubers, nuts and fruits of the forest.

The Chenchus administer herbal medicines. They have channelised their knowledge bank of herbal medicines over hundreds of years, by experimenting with several forest herbs and eventually zeroing in on successful treatment of various ailments. This is a feather in the cap of the Chenchu.

There is a total lack of business acumen amongst them as traditionally they were hunter-gatherers. They are yet to get out of their age-old practice of hunting daily for their day's requirements, and have not yet learnt to save for a rainy day. The Chenchus have chanced upon a means to earn money by becoming *coolies* and guides to the pilgrims visiting the ancient temple of Lord Shiva in Srisailam.

Over hundreds of years of living in the forest, the Chenchus have understood the cycle of seasons accurately. Their knowledge of the forest, its trees and its inhabitants is so immense that fifty per cent of Tiger trackers and anti-poachers in Nagarjuna-Srisailam Tiger Reserve are Chenchus. They train the non-Chenchu trackers in understanding animal movement, breeding season, animal protection etc.

They use donkeys as a means of transportation for carrying forest produce. The little huts they live in have thatched enclosures in front, meant for storing agricultural produce. About 80 families live in a radius of 50 kms. Huts are rebuilt every two or three years. The Chenchu population is low and their surrounding resources are plentiful.

Interestingly, if a son in the family is slated to get married, a separate hut is built for him where he is expected to live with his wife and raise a family. There is no joint family structure amongst the Chenchus. As far as marital issues are concerned, the Chenchus are democratic and usually uphold the interests of the married woman. In case she expresses a grievance, her in-laws take it as a personal insult to themselves and try their best to address her problems and solve them mostly in her favour.

True to the meaning of their name, the Chenchus seem to be simple people, not given to craftiness. It is imperative that we, the urbanites understand, respect and preserve the tribal tradition and protect their rights.

BSAP interaction with students at Nehru Zoological Park, 29th September 2013

Text & photo: Anjali Pande



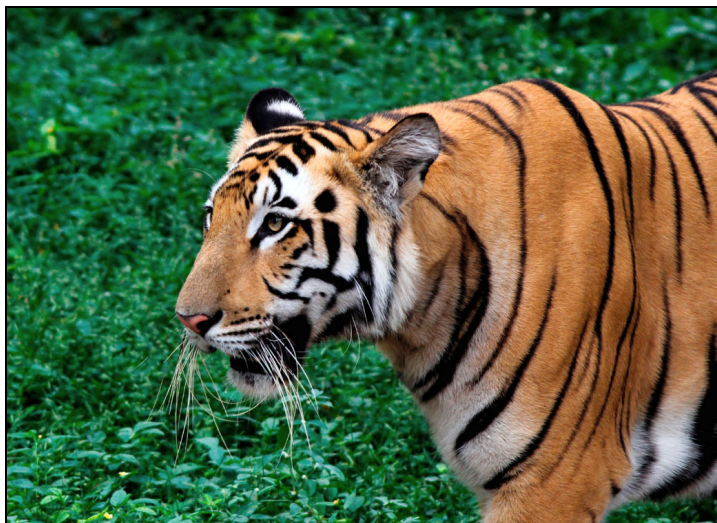
Shafaat Ulla sharing his thoughts with the students

At the request of Mr. K. Ajay Kumar, who represents a local NGO - *Society for Training, Awareness, Recruitment and Social Service* (STARS), Shafaat uncle and I interacted with a group of young zoology students from Saint Francis College for Women, Hyderabad at the Nehru Zoological Park. All the 46 students of B.Sc. (1st and 2nd year) were on an awareness visit to the zoo along with their teachers. While explaining the importance of birds in an eco-system Shafaat uncle narrated many interesting

facts from the world of ornithology. He gave a brief insight into various exciting aspects of bird studies and also provided information about endangered species, their conservation etc. I encouraged the students to take up bird watching as a hobby and advised them on their future options if they take up further studies in ornithology or environmental science. The talk ended with a question-answer session. Mr. Ajay Kumar, treasurer of STARS, thanked BSAP for facilitating the interaction.

Spot Photo Competition, Nehru Zoological Park, 29th September 2013

Arji Ravi



When I came to know that the Nehru Zoological Park was conducting a spot photo contest on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee celebrations, my friend Dinakar and I decided to participate. We sent a mail asking them to enrol us, but got a

reply that it was already too late to register; however, we were told that we could report at the Curator's Office on the day, 29th September 2013, and spot-register ourselves for the competition.

Accordingly, we went to the Nehru Zoo at 07.30AM on 29th September 2013 and got ourselves registered. At 09.00AM, the organisers addressed the gathering and shared the guidelines. We were given 2 hours time to submit the photos.

Not being sure of what to click and submit, we started by photographing birds for some time. After that, Dinakar and I decided that we should click the white tiger and the Indian (Bengal) tiger. When we went to the white tiger enclosure, however, we were disappointed to find that it was closed. Then we went to the Bengal tiger, but that enclosure also was not open. So we waited for some time and, in-between, clicked some parakeets on the trees.

At that time, one of the zoo employees told us that he was going to open the gates and suggested a good position to capture photos. We went to that spot and took some photos of the Bengal tigers and the white tiger, but I was not satisfied with the photographs I got. Somewhat frustrated, we stopped photographing animals and started taking some portrait shots of each other.

Suddenly, we realized that the time was nearly 11.00AM. We were not too keen to submit any photos for the competition, as

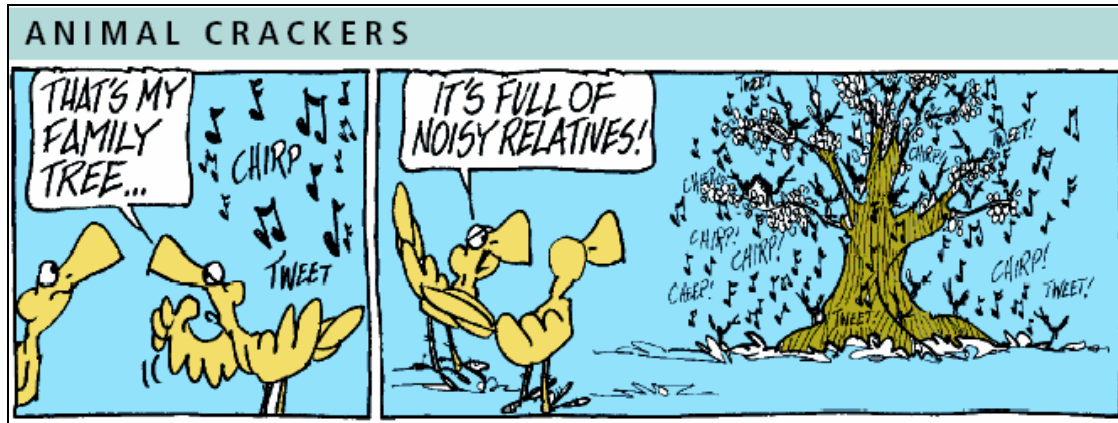
we felt we had not got even one good picture. But having travelled 20 km to the zoo, I thought of submitting at least one picture so that the purpose was served. Therefore, I selected one Bengal tiger picture and gave it to the organisers.

Later, I got busy with other things and forgot about the competition. So I was thrilled when I got a phone call from Mr. Prabhu on 9th October 2013, informing me that I had got a Consolation Prize for the photo I had submitted, and asking me to go and collect the Certificate the next day.

When I went to the Zoo on the 10th, I found that they had invited the Governor Sri Narasimhan to distribute the prizes, and I was happy that I would also receive the Certificate from the Governor. Unfortunately, the organizers then announced that due to paucity of time, the Governor would only give away the First prizes and the remaining prizes would be given away by other officials.

Anyway, I got a Consolation Prize certificate the very first time I have ever participated in a competition, and I am very happy about that.

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 03-09-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Ashy Woodswallow (*Artamus fuscus*)



Ashy Woodswallow
(Cherlapally, 19-09-2010)


Order: Passeriformes
Family: Artamidae
Genus: *Artamus*
Species: *A. fuscus*
Size: 18-19 cm

Description & distribution: The Ashy Woodswallow, also known as the Ashy Swallow-shrike, is found across a range of habitats, from the plains up to around 2000m, in cultivated areas, forests as well as areas with many palm trees. It is distributed across southern and eastern parts of Asia, including India (except the arid western regions), Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, China, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. It has also been recorded in Maldives. This stocky woodswallow has pinkish grey underparts, ashy grey upperparts, a darker head and a narrow pale band on the rump. The tail is short, square, and slaty black in colour tipped in white. It has a short, curved, finch-like bill which is silvery in colour. The wings are long and, in flight, look very broad at the base, giving them a triangular appearance.

There are no geographical variations in plumage, and the sexes are alike. One old report has suggested that there may be variations in colour in the inside of their cheeks. Young birds may show some barring on the undersides.

Behaviour: The Ashy Woodswallow is usually seen in small groups, sitting huddled side-by-side on electric wires, pylons, or the bare branches of tall trees. They make aerial sallies from their perches, flapping and gliding to catch insects in the air with their

beaks. They are known to catch the insect, transfer it to their claws, tear it up with their bills and swallow it, while still in flight. They may also return to the perch or, occasionally, to the ground to eat their prey. While their diet consists mainly of insects, they have been known to sometimes take nectar from flowers of trees like *Erythrina*, and even toxic *Danaiidae* butterflies which other birds avoid. They make seasonal movements, possibly in response to rainfall.

The Ashy Woodswallow has special feathers called powder down, which breaks down into fine dust which the bird uses to spread onto its body while preening. Its call is a shrill, nasal *chewk*, and the song is a combination of wheezy notes which may also include imitations of the calls of other birds. One sample can be heard here. 

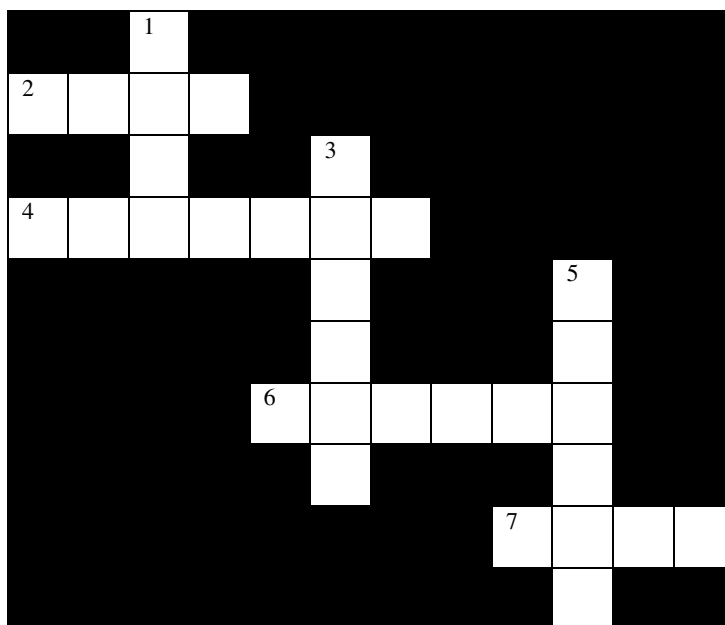
Nesting: The breeding season is between March and June in India. The shallow cup-like nest is usually built fairly high up, at locations like the top of a lamppost, or at the junction of a palm frond. The typical clutch consists of 2-3 eggs, greenish-white spotted with brown. Both parents share nest-building, incubation and feeding duties, and mob larger birds like crows or birds of prey if they approach too close.

Local name: The Ashy Woodswallow is known as '*tadi ababeel*' in Hindi, '*tad pitta*' or '*tadi pitta*' in Telugu and '*madam pura*' in Tamil.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #22

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's *Pitta*)



ACROSS

- 2 - Winged wader once worshipped? (4)
4 - Chief Engineer makes it plain to this bird (7)
6 - Wodehouse character takes to the waters (6)
7 - Duck taking tea before starting lunch? (4)

DOWN

- 1 - Will he use a spoon to find this bird? (4)
3 - Wise men take PE seriously (6)
5 - Intel goes North to find this bird (6)

Solutions to Crossword #21 (Pitta, September 2013)

ACROSS: 2 – BESRA, 6 – MONTAGU'S HARRIER, 7 – AZURE

DOWN: 1- JAEGER, 3 – MESIA, 4 – LARK, 5 – HAWK, 6 – MINLAS

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 11 November 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 10th November 2013: Cherlapalli Lake (Rampalli Cheruvu). Meeting point: 6.00AM, near Mangatrai Pearls.

Situated in the Cherlapally Industrial Area near ECIL, this water body and its surroundings abound in a large variety of avifauna. One can see a number of water birds like Teals, Cormorants, Coots, Ibises, Ducks, Herons, Waders, etc, in and around the lake. A bund separates the lake from the fields, marshes and scrub and a walk along it yields not just the regulars, but also some rare species. Many of these birds have been seen nesting here. The Cinnamon, Black and Yellow Bitterns, the Red-necked Falcon and the Slaty-breasted Rail have also been sighted here. This lush green area is relatively unexplored and quite undisturbed, making a visit worthwhile. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: EARTHFLIGHT Episode 5: ASIA and AUSTRALIA

Wednesday, 13th November 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

A British nature documentary, Earthflight is a six-part voyage of discovery, spanning six continents and covering some of the world's greatest natural spectacles from a 'bird's-eye view'. Narrated by actor David Tennant, it captures some of the world's most extraordinary natural wonders through the eyes of birds. It is, to put it simply, breathtaking.

In this bird's-eye view of two continents, demoiselle cranes negotiate a dangerous Himalayan pass on their way to India while high-flying bar-headed geese take the fast track five miles above. In Rajasthan, vultures watch hunting tigers hoping for a meal and pigeons visit a temple dedicated solely to sacred rats. Pigeons are also our guide to the greatest gatherings of camels on Earth and learn to dodge buzzards around the battlements of Jodhpur Fort. 9,000 cranes overwinter in the most unlikely of spots - a barbed wire compound in the centre of a desert town. In Australia, rainbow lorikeets drop in on Sydney and patrol Australia's Gold Coast. In the outback, white cockatoos swirl in thousands and budgerigars pass Uluru (Ayers Rock) and gather in the biggest flocks ever recorded.

In China, swallows and swifts visit the Great Wall and the Forbidden City of Beijing. In Japan, the country's most revered birds – Japanese cranes are fed fish by appreciative locals and are joined in strange, momentary harmony by hungry red foxes, white-tailed eagles and Steller's eagles. As peace descends, Japanese cranes dance beautifully in the snow.

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 24th November 2013: Inkriyal / Edulabad / Bibinagar / Bhongir Lakes. Meeting point: 6.00AM, near Mangatrai Pearls.

Route: Begumpet – Tarnaka - Uppal Crossroads - Ghatkesar via Warangal Road – Inkriyal / Edulabad / Bibinagar / Bhongir. This trip promises to be a wader birding bonanza. Carry breakfast, plenty of water, a rain poncho or an umbrella to beat the inclement weather. Wear sturdy hiking boots or sandals. There will be a stop-over at Bhongir for lunch and also, time and weather permitting, a hike up to the fort which promises great views of the surrounding locales and good birding. For further coordination, please contact Surekha Aithabathula (99490-38532).

WHERE THE FOX ROAMED ONCE

Trip Report – Fox Sagar & Shamirpet – 27th October 2013

Text: Surekha Aitabathula; Photos: Humayun Taher

My first reaction when I saw the outdoor event notice was "Fox Sagar? Interesting name. Why Fox? Did the fox roam there once upon a time?" "Yes," said Google. Located near Jeedimetla, Fox Sagar is English for *Nakkala Cheruvu* in

Telugu. Once a sprawling River flowing over five hundred acres, it has now shrunk to just about a hundred acres. It was a dense forest in those days and it is said that lots of foxes came to Fox Sagar at night to drink water, hence the name.



The Nizam of Hyderabad built a dam across the river and named it Fox Sagar in 1897. A pump house was built on the bund which helped provide water for drinking and irrigation purposes. It was a much better fishing spot then. Fishing still continues but on a much smaller scale. Jeedimetla being an industrial area, industrial effluents are being quietly emptied into this Lake. This is decimating the fish very successfully. (Tongue firmly in cheek!)

Rampant encroachment is evident here resulting in the shrinking Lake bed area. Mushrooming residential complexes also apparently empty their drainage into this Lake. Summary? Fox Sagar waters are polluted. Contrast today's scenario with the scene 116 years ago. Back then, when the Musi overflowed, flood waters were let into Fox Sagar and if Fox Sagar overflowed, the flood waters were let into the Hussain Sagar through *nallahs*.

Polluted water, yes. Encroachment, yes. Lake bed shrinkage, yes. Despite all this, we spotted 58 bird species here. Thank God for small mercies!

My debut to Fox Sagar was soul satisfying. It was only after several wrong turns and much map Googling, we eventually arrived at designated spot. As soon as we stepped on to the bund, we spotted a Jacobin or Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*). Fortunately for us, it was a very close sighting. The color and the crest were very clear.



Greater Coucal

This was on the right side. On the left and also at very close by was a Greater Coucal or Crow Pheasant (*Centropus sinensis*) sitting at the base of a pylon. Known as Bhardwaj in Hindi, the Coucal is black with chestnut wings, and is a non-parasitic member of the *Cuculiformes* order. The name *Centropus* is derived from the Greek *kantron*, meaning a spike or a spur, and *pous*, meaning foot. This refers to the hind claw of this bird which is long, straight and spike-like. It has a long and graduated pheasant-like tail and the call is a resonant *coop coop*.

We then saw the Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*) up close with its pristine white throat and breast, yellow iris, orange eye ring, white lores and supercilium. In the lake and on its edge were Little and Large Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger* and *carbo* respectively), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*), Intermediate Egrets (*Egretta intermedia*), a lone Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*), Purple Herons (*Ardea purpurea*), Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) and Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*).



Great Cormorant



Long-tailed Shrike

From the bund, right in front of us were some trees in which we saw Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*), Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*), Large Grey Babbler (*Turdoides malcomi*), Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Indian Black Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) and Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*).



Green Bee-eater

Shafaat saab, Haragopal garu and Ajit garu got off the bund and went exploring the very narrow stretch of road along the lake. Then we drove to the end of the road. Here it seemed as though Barn Swallows were celebrating a festival! We saw over two hundred Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) on the wires - superb sighting by Shafaat saab this. Both the White-breasted (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) and the Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and the Red-wattled Lapwing were spotted

here. We also saw several Cormorants landing into water for community fishing. A Little Grebe (*Tachybaptos ruficollis*) paddled the water silently. We also saw an Indian Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) and several Asian Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) and Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) in flight.



Red-vented Bulbul and Chestnut-tailed Starling

After happy birding in Fox Sagar we moved towards the backwaters of Shamirpet Lake. Every birder worth his salt was immensely thrilled to spot a tea stall on the approach to the lake. We sat down to heavenly cups of welcome tea and coffee. A Laughing Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*), so named owing to the nature of its call, sat right in front of us for quite a while without moving. Somewhat fearfully, I wondered if it was injured but then I was immensely relieved to see it fly away. By now it was raptor time. We saw an Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), quite far away but close enough for identification. It was alternately circling above and flying low and perching on a rock. This place had beautiful rocks on which perched a colony of twenty Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*). Another great spotting was the Pallid Harrier (*Circus macrourus*), flying low just like his cousin. This slender hawk is a gorgeous grey with distinct black wing tips in flight.

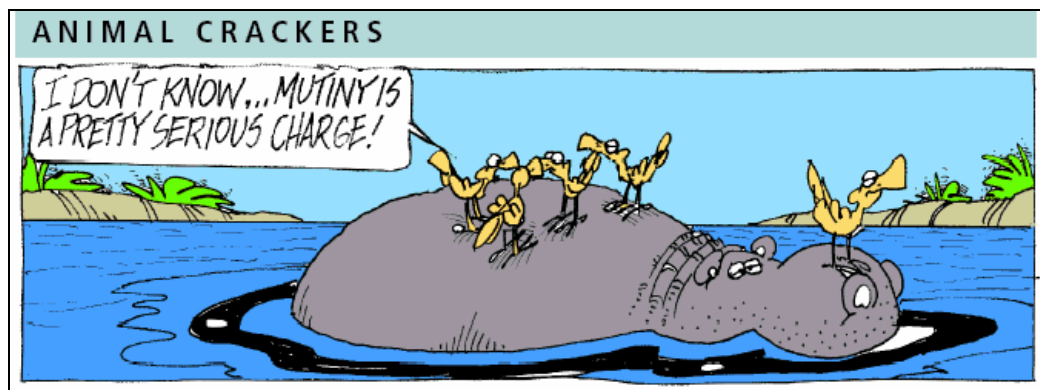
Common Stonechats (*Saxicola torquatus*) on stones greeted us as we walked into the slush and grass towards the lake. We saw several birds like Rufous-tailed Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*), Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), Syke's Lark (*Galerida deva*) and White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) here.

Although we were birding till noon, the heat wasn't really unbearable, signalling that winter is on its way. We all said our goodbyes, looking forward to going birding again soon when winter would have set in.

List of birds seen at Fox Sagar / Shamirpet:

1. House Sparrow
2. House Crow
3. Red-vented Bulbul
4. Blue Rock Pigeon
5. Laughing Dove
6. Common Myna
7. Chestnut-tailed Starling
8. Asian Pied Starling
9. Brahminy Starling
10. Indian Roller
11. Common Hoopoe
12. Rose-ringed Parakeet
13. Indian Robin
14. Oriental Magpie Robin
15. Indian Grey Hornbill
16. Indian Peafowl
17. Black Kite
18. Black-shouldered Kite
19. Brahminy Kite
20. Eurasian Marsh Harrier
21. Pallid Harrier
22. White-browed Wagtail
23. Spot-billed Duck
24. Grey Heron
25. Indian Pond Heron
26. Purple Heron
27. Cattle Egret
28. Little Egret
29. Intermediate Egret
30. Large Egret
31. Black Ibis
32. Glossy Ibis
33. Black-winged Stilt
34. Painted Stork
35. Darter
36. Little Cormorant
37. Great Cormorant
38. River Tern
39. Red-wattled Lapwing
40. Common Coot
41. White-breasted Waterhen
42. Little Grebe
43. Green Sandpiper
44. Grey Francolin
45. Greater Coucal
46. Jungle Babbler
47. Zitting Cisticola
48. Coppersmith Barbet
49. Plain Prinia
50. Ashy Prinia
51. Barn Swallow
52. Streak-throated Swallow
53. Indian Golden Oriole
54. Brown Shrike
55. Long-tailed Shrike
56. Green Bee-eater
57. Common Stonechat
58. Small Minivet
59. Sykes's Lark
60. Baya Weaver
61. Purple Sunbird
62. Pied Crested Cuckoo

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 17-09-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)



Common Myna (Cherlapally, 19-09-2010)


Order: Passeriformes
Family: Sturnidae
Genus: *Acridotheres*
Species: *A. tristis*
Size: 25 cm

Description & distribution: The Common Myna is a member of the Sturnidae family, which consists of mynas and starlings. It is easy to identify, with a brown body, black head and bright yellow peri-orbital patch behind the eye. The bill and legs are also bright yellow in colour. The outer primaries and the underside of the wings are white. Birds from north-western parts of India tend to be somewhat paler as compared to their counterparts from south India. The sexes are similar.

The Common Myna is typically found in open woodland, cultivation and around habitation, but thrives in urban and suburban environments. It is omnivorous, can survive in a wide range of temperatures and is highly adaptable to different conditions. It is native to most of Asia, including Iran, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indo-China, and some parts of central Asia like Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan. It is also an introduced species in many countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Israel, and on islands in the Indian Ocean, such as Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles (besides islands of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans). In fact the range is increasing so widely that in 2000, the Common Myna was declared one of the world's worst 100 invasive species (a list which includes only three birds – the Common Myna, the Red-vented Bulbul and the European Starling).

Behaviour: The Common Myna is usually seen singly or in pairs. It has a strong territorial instinct and can be extremely aggressive with other birds which it perceives to be infringing upon its

space. It feeds on a variety of food including ground-dwelling insects (such as grasshoppers), arachnids, crustaceans, reptiles, small mammals, grain, seeds, fruits such as grapes, plums and berries and, near habitation, discarded human food. The Common Myna roosts communally throughout the year in large flocks which may include Jungle Mynas, Rosy Starlings, House Crows, Jungle Crows, Cattle Egrets, Rose-ringed Parakeets and other birds.

The calls of the Common Myna include a wide range of chirps, whistles, squawks, growls, clicks, croaks, etc. One sample can be heard here.  The Common Myna also screeches a warning to its mate or other birds if predators are nearby, and when it is about to take off. It is also popular as a cage-bird for its singing and mimicking abilities.

Nesting: The Common Myna is believed to pair for life. It is a hollow-nesting species, and uses protected hollows which may be natural (such as those found in trees) or artificial (such as recesses in buildings). It may also use nests of other birds like woodpeckers and parakeets, and also takes to nest-boxes quite easily. Nesting material includes twigs, roots, grass or scraps of rubbish, and mynas have also been known to use tissue paper, tin foil and sloughed off snake-skin. The Common Myna often evicts chicks of previously-nesting birds. It breeds through most of the year, with some variations depending on the location. The typical clutch consists of 4-6 turquoise blue eggs.

Local name: The Common Myna is known as '*desi myna*' in Hindi, '*goranka*' in Telugu and '*narthan kuruvi*' in Tamil. In literature, it appears most often under the name of '*saarika*' or '*bharat saarika*', featuring in Sanskrit as well as old Buddhist texts. Other names include descriptive terms like '*kalahapriya*' (one who is fond of arguments), '*chitranetra*' (one with picturesque eyes), '*peetanetra*' (one with yellow eyes) and '*peetapaada*' (one with yellow legs).

ROLE OF ZOOLOGICAL PARKS IN CONSERVATION OF WILD LIFE

Report – Indoor Meeting - Talk by Mr Sankaran – 23rd October 2013

Shafaat Ulla

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of our Zoo Park, we invited Mr. Shankaran, Deputy Conservator of Forests & Curator, Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad, to give us a talk on various aspects of zoo administration for the benefit of our members and others. It was a very informative and interesting talk, which the audience thoroughly appreciated.

The zoo park was established on 6th October, 1963. It covers an area of 380 acres and has 1600 animals, representing 163 species. Many of the animals are from other countries, for instance Giraffe, Hippopotamus, Cheetah, Jaguar, Baboon, etc. In addition, the zoo park has many 'firsts' to its credit like the Lion Safari, Nocturnal Animal House, Pre-historic Park, Reptile House and more recently, Butterfly Park. The zoo park is a very popular destination for residents of Hyderabad and other tourists – it has attracted 30 lakh visitors so far, and the number is increasing!

Our zoo is the first one in India which mooted the idea of the 'park' concept, where animals are kept in large and open enclosures surrounded by open moats filled with water, for the safety of both animals and onlookers. The entire zoo area has a lush green landscape with a mosaic of vegetation, including ponds and large water bodies. It is situated next to the 200-year-old Mir Alam Tank, which covers an area of 400 acres, with a unique bund consisting of 24 arches. The water from the tank is used for the upkeep of the zoo park.

The zoo park plays a very important role in conservation of wild life and other related activities. The main task of conservation of endangered animals is breeding which can be divided into "Conservation Breeding" and "Captive Breeding". Conservation Breeding is done in special enclosures which are closely monitored and are not open to the public. Two notable species whose breeding was successful are the Mouse Deer and Vulture. Captive Breeding has also been very successful and the animals are open for public display. Some examples are Pheasants, Lions, Jaguar, Baboons, Pelicans, Sarus Cranes, etc.

It is to be noted that herbivores can be raised and relocated in the wild and they survive easily if the habitat is suitable with proper fodder. However, carnivores like Tigers and Leopards, when bred in captivity, cannot be relocated as they have not learnt how to catch and kill their prey and hence cannot survive in the wild. This technique is acquired by the young

from their mothers who methodically teach them the art of hunting. Therefore conservation of these carnivores has to be done *in situ* where large tracts of their natural habitat are protected by the forest department from hunters, poachers and habitat destruction, to ensure safety and adequate prey base. That is why so many Wild Life Sanctuaries, National Parks, Tiger Reserves had to be created. It may not be out of place to mention that there were about 14,000 tigers in India at the time of our independence. Sadly, only 1400 or so survive. Tigers are at the top of the food chain and if they are protected, then all the fauna and flora down the line benefits.

In addition to *ex situ* breeding within its premises, the zoo park has the additional task of rescuing wild animals followed by their rehabilitation. For this, the zoo has a team of dedicated staff and veterinarians, as also an animal ambulance. So far they have relocated about 2000 herbivores at various locations.

Apart from conservation activities, the zoo plays an important role in bringing awareness to the general public about the importance of conserving wild life. There is a separate research centre for wild-life studies, conservation and management. Considerable efforts are made to impart zoo education to various stake holders, particularly school children, by organising regular painting and other competitions and also celebrating Sparrow Day, Earth Day, etc.

Recently the zoo park has taken school children, both boys and girls, as volunteer guides. These students, numbering about fifty, come every Sunday and are stationed at different enclosures to control the crowds who often tease the animals or try to feed them, which can be harmful to them.

Some of the BSAP members happened to meet the volunteers and most expressed a desire to learn more about bird watching. The Executive Committee of our society has therefore decided to take the volunteers around the zoo and familiarise them with birds and bird identification. More than a hundred species of wild birds can be found in the zoo premises because of the greenery and the wide variety of habitats which exist in the sprawling campus. No wonder our zoo park is therefore a favourite spot of BSAP members, who go there regularly for bird watching.

For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 10 Number 12 December 2013

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 15th December 2013: Sanjeevaiah Park, 6.00AM.

This visit will be aimed at achieving twin objectives: the regular field visit, as well as the Asian Waterfowl Census exercise. Therefore, the visit will begin with a briefing by Humayun Taher on various aspects pertaining to bird counting, followed by a bird-walk around the Park. Spread out over 90 acres, the park, abutting the Hussain Sagar Lake in the heart of the city, is a great spot for birding. In addition to the resident species like the Orioles, Sunbirds, Drongos, Asian Pied Starlings, etc, we should also get to see a good number of migrants. The lakeshore should also offer a good variety of waders. Please carry binoculars, field guides and notebooks to make a note of the species seen and the numbers counted. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Humayun Taher on Asian Waterfowl Census

Monday, 16th December 2013, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Humayun will share with us the importance of animal and bird census as a tool for conservation of habitats, and will also enlighten us on various methods and techniques of counting birds.

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 29th December 2013: Manjira Barrage and Sangareddy Tank. Meeting point: 6.00AM, near Mangatrai Pearls.

As with the first field trip, we will combine the regular field visit with the Asian Waterfowl Census exercise on this trip too. Made up of several small islands, the Manjira Bird Sanctuary is spread over 20 sq km and is nestled between the Manjira and Singur barrages. A number of migratory and resident birds nest and breed here. Painted Storks, Herons, Wigeons, Teals, Cormorants, Pochards, Black and White Ibises, etc can be found here. A few Mugger crocodiles too call this sanctuary home. It is located 60km from Hyderabad. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aithabathula (99490-38532).

We wish all our members a very happy New Year 2014

Trip Report – Damagundam – 8th September 2013

Sharada Annamaraju

Let's start from the very beginning; it's a very good place to start. When Surekha floated news of a reconnaissance trip to a new birding spot near Vikarabad organised by Shafaat Uncle and his son Ishrat, I grew bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Joined by Vinay, Sagarika, Jayati, Anjali and Nandu Uncle, we left early for Damagundam in the wee hours of September 8, a Sunday.

It had rained furiously the previous night and the skies were still overcast as we hurtled across stretches of good and potholed roads towards Vikarabad, 80 kms away. Thankfully our two-car parade was just greeted with an intermittent drizzle through the day except when the Sun broke out in a grin for a moment or two. Indeed, all around in the horizon we saw misty waterspouts where the clouds and the earth merged in a torrent of rain.



Photo: Sharada Annamaraju

The arid environs of Hyderabad are really transformed in the monsoons. Unless one drives out of the urban jungle that Hyderabad has transformed into over the past decade, it is tough to gain a sense of the emerald green coat that the landscape wears during the four rainy months. Unaccustomed to such greenery, we searched for words to describe the countryside as we neared Damagundam and the closest we could come up with were Munnar and the 1965 musical, ‘The Sound of Music’.

(*Francolinus pondicerianus*) comically scampered across the track and dived into bushes, their hearts thumping wildly. A few Bay-backed Shrikes (*Lanius vittatus*) turned up here and there. Laughing Doves (*Spilopelia senegalensis*) cooed softly from overhead branches. The lower hanging ones, decked with thorns occasionally smacked us in our faces. Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) are also rumoured to be occasionally seen around here.



Photo: Anjali Pande

Post a cup of hot ginger tea at the Grasswalk Resort in the vicinity - if you have been a member of the BSAP for a while now, you will completely understand that *chai* is an indelible ritual on our outings - Ishrat forded us in two batches across a massive ditch filled with rainwater, and a kilometer or two across a meandering route in his 1971 make Willys jeep, to our newest covert birding spot. Damagundam is really the discovery of Ishrat and his friends. And no, there’s no other way to reach Damagundam but across the ditch. It’s our equivalent of the Bridge to Terabithia or Blyton’s ‘The Magic Faraway Tree’. Either that or you just stumble across it while lost in Vikarabad.

Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) skirted the dirt path, scurrying away with their long trains studded with the eyes of Argus and five-a-piece harems bouncing in their wake. Grey Francolins



Photo: Anjali Pande

We alighted near a smallish temple dedicated to Lord Shiva in the middle of a pool. On a giant tree with massive roots, we spotted Common Ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*), Oriental White-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), a White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caeruleus*) and the Jerdon’s Leafbird (*Chloropsis jerdoni*). A couple of Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) alighted in the horizon.

From here, we ventured out to the countryside with trees scattered across the landscape. The forests in Damagundam seemed to be ‘secondary growth’ after a period of deforestation. Here, we began a long, arduous trek across a grassy landscape traipsing across the occasional stream, and dodged patches of wild flowers in pinks, purples, blues and whites. Some seemed to grow only where granite lay exposed.



Photo: Anjali Pande

A sudden whirring sound would be startled quails taking off in alarm. A Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) cleared its throat in the distance. All we were missing were several Holstein Friesian breeds dotting the landscape and a picnic basket, while golden-haired Maria taught us ‘Doe, a Deer’ on a slope. The view of the valley and distant hills here were magnificent and more than made up for lack of birding. Yet, all potential hallmarks of prime harrier country in winter abound here.

It was somewhere around the grassy slopes that a mass of flies decided I was a worthy cow and began to buzz around my head. The few that sat on others also began to join this column. Mercifully, the trek following a circuitous route neared an end and we plodded our way back to the resort with clumps of red mud caked to our shoes. A glory lily here and there brought respite to the green-as-green-can-be surroundings. As the flies petered off, we spotted two Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), their flame-orange in stark contrast to the dull-grey skies and shocking green of foliage.

We were greeted with a much-needed breakfast of omelettes, *vadas* and *upma* which we scarfed down like a tribe that had lost its way in the desert. We wound down our long day and

headed home, through a tiny hamlet where House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) abounded.

Damagundam’s environs are a great alternative to our old spot from Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Ananthagiri Hills. As newer temple complexes spring up and more pilgrims venture into the forest for picnics, the birds are being disturbed at a greater scale and more trash is entering the ecosystem there. The relatively undisturbed foliage and undergrowth in Damagundam also means not just the possibility of seeing the same species as in Ananthagiri, but also a chance for surprises. The only minus point is its relative inaccessibility – which, probably, is really a good thing.

In all, we saw some 41 species. We did not have time enough to explore what lay on the other side of the forest near the temple and this means only one thing; a revisit!

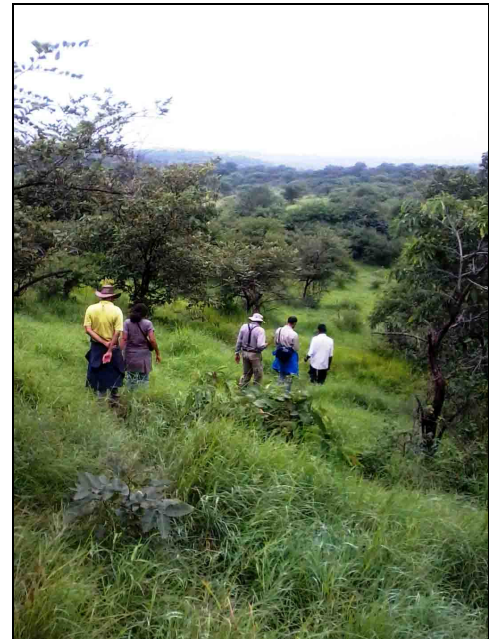
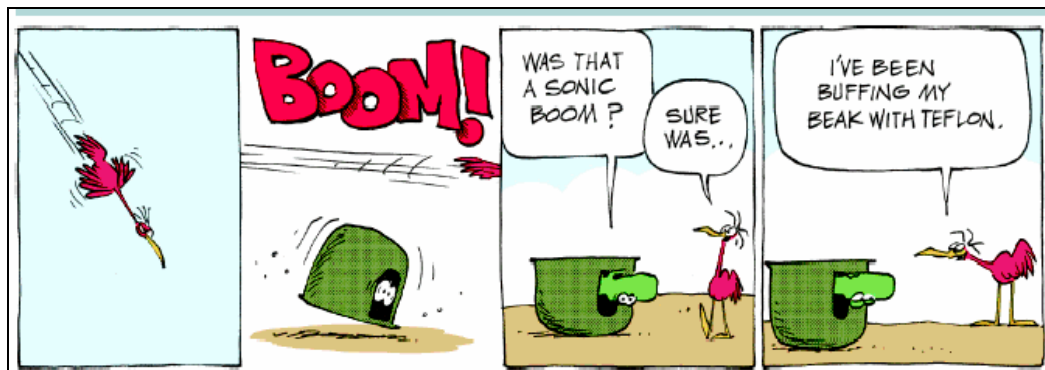


Photo: Sharada Annamaraju

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 23-06-2012)

Trip Report – Coorg – 1st to 5th October 2013

Text: Sheetal Vyas; Photos: Dr Samuel Sukumar

An enthusiastic group of around 20 birders hauled themselves on to Kacheguda Express on 1st October: our destination was Madikeri and we were ready. But not quite. Keeping up the tradition for last-minute drama on BSAP outings, Jayati was yet to arrive and the train was making ominous signs of departing on time. Again in salute to old convention, she arrived at the very last minute and we were not, after all, obliged to illegally pull the chain. But we were off and even before dinner was brought out, Dr Sukumar passed around an excellent dossier he had put together on the birds we might expect.

In Bangalore the next day we found our mini-bus – a red contraption with ‘Athreya’ embellished across it. It would be something like our home for the next week. After breakfast at a nice little place in the station, we made our lumbering way to Madikeri after picking up Shweta en route at Mysore. Our pace was laborious – Mr Athreya was not given to speed - and we were passed easily by Nandu *saab* and his family who had made the trip by road. With the hour too advanced to make anything of birding we decided to at least put what was left of the day to tourist use. We detoured to the Tibetan settlement of Bylakuppe and the wonderful Namdroling Monastery they have here.



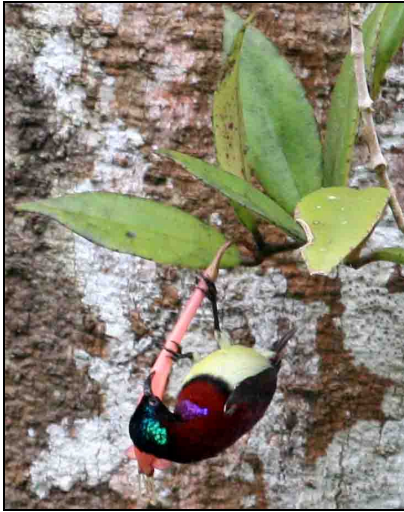
White-cheeked Barbet

On Day 3 we set out by road deciding to stop here and there at promising spots. The weather was wonderful and almost at once we saw several Orange Minivets (*Pericrocotus flammeus*). The woods were full of sounds and we managed to get views of a pair of White-cheeked Barbets (*Megalaima viridis*) that posed in a variety of poses, catching the sunlight this way and that. Other sightings included the Blue-winged or Malabar Parakeet (*Psittacula columboides*), which we saw almost at every location from here on, the Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) and the Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa latirostris*).



Jungle Myna

We headed then to the famous Bhagmandala temple and Talacauvery, the place where the Cauvery springs from. This was a beautiful, mist-kissed location – and to seal the ambience a man making fresh *bhajjis* that only whetted our appetites for lunch. At the restaurant later, we saw Dusky Crag Martins (*Ptyonoprogne concolor*) at their nests, swooping around. The advancing afternoon found us at the spectacular Abbi Falls – we trudged to the falls and back, and as we waited for everyone to gather, some rather noisy calls from the foliage drew us closer. They were Rufous Babblers (*Turdoides subrufa*) chattering away in one final blast before they retired for the night.



Crimson-backed Sunbird

Day 4 brought us the company of Madikeri's wonderful birders Mr Shrikantha Rao V and Dr SV Narasimhan. We went over to Virajpet, where they gave us a most wonderful breakfast and then accompanied us to the plantations at Maggula village to a place called Cheriyaakund. It was a beautiful morning and we spotted at once the Crimson-backed Sunbird (*Leptocoma minima*), as well as the Loten's Sunbird (*Cinnyris lotenius*). There was a Bronzed Drongo (*Dicrurus aeneus*) too, which I didn't see alas. As we walked on I came upon a group gazing intently at some thick foliage. 'What, where?!' the inevitable urgent whispers yielded a hushed answer: a pair of Asian Fairy-bluebirds (*Irena puella*) among the shaded leaves. After much swooping and moving, everyone managed to see the female at least.



Asian Fairy-bluebird

Then Anjali's sharp eyes spotted a raptor sitting on a tree in the distance: an Oriental Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) catching the sunlight. It was raptor season for a bit after that, because a Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) came hovering. It glided alongside us, then flew right ahead, letting us glimpse its splendour rather closely. The long line of birders had split into smaller groups by then but everyone managed to see it. 'Did you see the Black Eagle!' everyone asked everyone else.



House Sparrow

The shrubbery ahead was good hunting ground for the Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*) and the White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*), Mr Shrikantha Rao told us. We saw neither and a little further we wasted a good 20 minutes on some suspicious thrush-like rustlings in the scrub but saw nothing. We went later that day to Iruppu Falls which was a stiff climb and tremendous fun. After lunch, we hastened to a safari in Nagarhole National Park. The safari yielded some deer, wild boar, the merest hint of a tiger (it wandered off before anyone but the guide spotted it), langur...



Langur



Indian Elephant

We saw a Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) sitting on a twig in rather royal attitude and then, as we had given up hopes of anything very extraordinary, three or four first-losing-and-then-suddenly-still figures in the tall grass. Were they civets, mongoose or, even as someone suggested wildly, wild dogs?! It was later suggested that they might have been the Stripe-necked mongoose but on consulting the book, the likeliest answer to the puzzle appeared to be the Nilgiri Marten (*Martes gwatkinsi*).



Great Tit

Day 5 was a bit disappointing. The ambience was there – we went under Mr Shrikantha Rao's guidance to a gorgeously appointed sacred grove called Betoli Devarakadu. But it drizzled and in spite of the potential, birding was tough going. We managed to round up the Great Tit (*Parus major*), some sunbirds, and Sharada came back with one splinter group having managed the White-bellied Treepie (*Dendrocitta leucogastra*). Still, there is nothing some tea and onion *pakor*s won't improve – all thanks to Mrs Rao whose hospitality we enjoyed so much, many of us later refused lunch!



Malabar Grey Hornbill

Some of us were determined to extract fun from the day, even if birding was denied us and so we turned the bus towards Abbi Falls again where we trudged in the rain across a lovely roaring torrent upstream of the falls. This was leech territory and we came back with the bloodsuckers having to be plucked off from in between our toes. A coffee rounded off the refreshing walk and the sighting of a Malabar Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros griseus*) absolutely set the seal on the outing.

It was time for us to return to Bangalore the next day and we decided to break for a little while at Nisargadhama, an island formed by the river Cauvery. It was a short stop but so lucrative! We saw the Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*), and just opposite was the Vernal Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus vernalis*) and then we were swivelling our necks to catch sight of the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos nanus*). A fine end to a fun trip.



Vernal Hanging Parrot

It was many years since I'd been on such a trip, and it was so much fun to be amidst BSAP's birders again. Our heartfelt thanks to Coorg's naturalists Mr Shrikantha Rao, Dr SV Narasimhan and Dr Bishan Monappa – the trip was so much richer for their company, so much warmer for their hospitality.

Complete list of birds seen during the trip:

1. Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)
2. Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
3. Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)
4. Intermediate Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*)
5. Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*)
6. Crimson-backed Sunbird (*Leptocoma minima*)
7. Loten's Sunbird (*Cinnyris lotenius*)
8. House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)
9. Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
10. Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*)
11. Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*)
12. Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
13. Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*)
14. Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa*)
15. Chestnut-tailed Starling (*Sturnia malabarica*)
16. Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)
17. Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)
18. Bronzed Drongo (*Dicrurus aeneus*)
19. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*)
20. Great Tit (*Parus major*)
21. Indian Yellow Tit (*Parus aplonotus*)
22. Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*)
23. Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)
24. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)
25. Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola greyii*)
26. Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*)
27. Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)
28. White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)
29. Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*)
30. Red-wattled lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)
31. Mountain Imperial Pigeon (*Dacula badia*)
32. Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)
33. Nilgiri Wood Pigeon (*Columba elphinstonii*)
34. Laughing Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*)
35. Spotted dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*)
36. Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
37. Vernal Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus vernalis*)
38. Malabar/Blue-winged Parakeet (*Psittacula colomboides*)
39. Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*)
40. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
41. Asian Palm Swift (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*)
42. House Swift (*Apus affinis*)
43. Dusky Crag Martin (*Hirundo concolor*)
44. Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*)
45. Ashy Woodswallow (*Artamus fuscus*)
46. Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
47. Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)
48. Yellow-throated Bulbul (*pycnonotus xantholaemus*)
49. Yellow-browed Bulbul (*iole indica*)
50. Flame-throated Bulbul (*Pycnonotus gularis*)
51. Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*)
52. Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*)
53. Jerdon's Leafbird (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*)
54. Asian Fairy-bluebird (*irina puella*)
55. Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*)
56. Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*)
57. Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*)
58. Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*)
59. Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*)
60. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*)
61. Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*)
62. Indian Rufous Babbler (*Turdoides subrufa*)
63. Puff-throated Babbler (*Pellorneum ruficeps*)
64. Dark-fronted Babbler (*Rhopocichla articeps*)
65. Malabar Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros griseus*)
66. Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*)
67. White-cheeked Barbet (*Megalaima viridis*)
68. Malabar/Crimson-throated Barbet (*Megalaima rubricapilla*) malabarica)
69. Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus nanus*)
70. Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*)
71. Flameback (*Chrysocolaptes lucidus*)
72. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
73. Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)
74. White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*)
75. Orange Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*)
76. Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*)
77. Small Blue Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)
78. White-breasted Kingfisher (*halcyon smyrnensis*)
79. Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)
80. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (*Merops lechenaulti*)
81. Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*)
82. Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*)
83. Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch (*Sitta castanea*)
84. Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*)
85. Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)
86. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
87. Indian Silverbill (*Euodice malabarica*)
88. White-rumped Munia (*Lonchura striata*)
89. Tricolored Munia (*Lonchura malacca*)
90. Indian Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*)
91. Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)
92. White-bellied Treepie (*Dendrocitta leucogastra*)
93. Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*)
94. Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*)
95. Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*)
96. Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*)
97. Lesser Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)
98. Grey-breasted Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*) (Call)
99. Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*) (Call)

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)



House Crow

(Cherlapally, 19-09-2010)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Corvidae
Genus: *Corvus*
Species: *C. splendens*
Size: 40 cm


Description & distribution: The House Crow is a common member of the Corvidae family, which is of Asian origin but has now spread to many other parts of the world. It is slimmer than other corvids like carrion crows and jackdaws. The forehead, crown, throat and upper breast are a rich glossy black, while the neck and breast are greyish-brown. The wings, tail and legs are black. Four races are described. The nominate race *C. splendens*, found in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, has a grey neck collar. The subspecies *C. s. protegatus* of southern India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives (which is sometimes separated as *C. s. maledivicus*) is darker grey. *C. s. insolens* of Myanmar is the darkest and also does not show the grey collar. To the west, in dry parts of south Asia and Iran, the subspecies *C. s. zugmayeri* has a very pale neck collar.

The House Crow is widely distributed in south Asia, being a native species in coastal parts of southern Iran, Pakistan, India (including Lakshadweep islands), Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and south-west Thailand. It is an introduced species in east Africa and in Australia, where it has been exterminated as a pest. It has recently arrived in parts of Europe, and there is even a small resident population in Florida, USA.

Across its range, the House Crow is found near human habitation, whether small villages or large cities. Being an

omnivorous scavenger, it is highly adaptable and has very high invasive potential. Its numbers have multiplied proportionately with human population growth, and no populations are known to exist independently of humans.

Behaviour: A noisy species, the House Crow may be seen singly or in groups. It generally feeds on refuse near human settlements, foraging near marketplaces and garbage dumps. It also eats small reptiles, insects and small invertebrates, eggs, nestlings, grain and fruits. Most food is taken from the ground, though it has been known to feed from trees too. Highly opportunistic, it occasionally feeds on carcasses, following it up by ingesting sand, and has also been seen swooping down from the air to pick up baby squirrels.

The House Crow roosts communally near human habitation - over busy streets, well-lit areas with lot of activity, tall trees with dense crowns - and the roosting sites are often enclosed by tall buildings. The call of the House Crow is a harsh *kaaa-kaaa*. A sample can be heard here. 

Nesting: The breeding season is usually between April and July. The House Crow builds stick nests where it lays 3-6 bluish-grey eggs, and prefers trees with large crowns for nesting (though it may occasionally nest even on telephone towers).

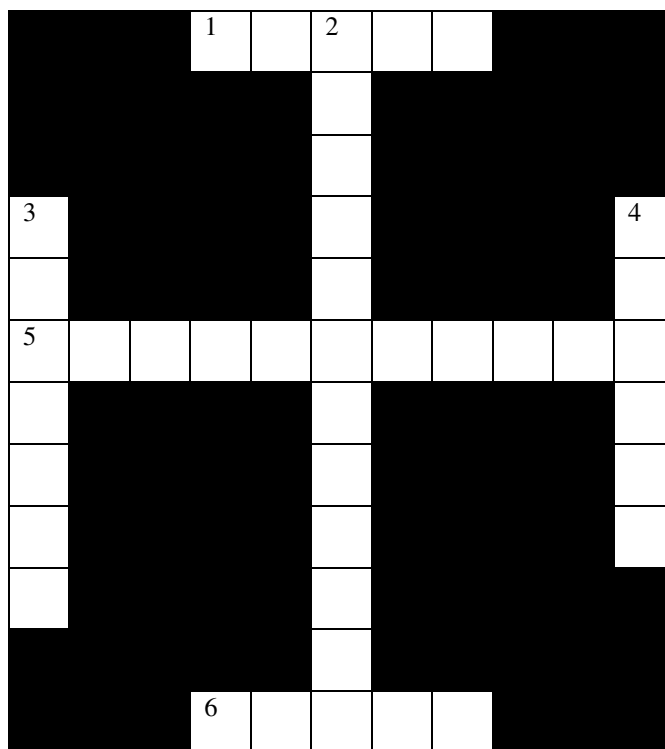
Local name: The House Crow is known as 'kowwa' or 'desi kowwa' in Hindi, 'kaki' or 'manchi kaki' in Telugu and 'kaka' or 'kakai' in Tamil and Malayalam.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #23

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!

(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 1 - This bird is aimless without the leg-spinner! (5)
5 - Approaches merger a mile ahead (11)
6 - Birds found half the winter at the Poles (5)

DOWN

- 2 - Perish under the top bird! (12)
3 - Valiant bird though disturbed (6)
4 - Songbird feels almost the full thrust of this clue! (6)

Solutions to Crossword #22 (Pitta, October 2013)

ACROSS: 2 – IBIS, 4 - PELICAN, 6 – WIGEON, 7 – TEAL

DOWN: 1- BILL, 3 – MAGPIE, 5 – LINNET

For Private Circulation Only

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